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THE DARK TOWER

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THE DARK TOWER

THE DARK TOWER

by

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

The Green Leaf Library

Collins

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To
Jessin

I

'You must have had a wonderful time,' said Marsden. 'And your letter hinted at a story. Let's have it.'

We were sitting together in the high room that he had taken when first he came to London from North Bromwich and occupied ever since. He had chosen it first of all because of its comparative silence; for his study in the offices of the paper was made hellish by the clatter of lino-machines; and then, again, for the sense of remoteness and seclusion which arose from the great height at which it was perched above the sounding streets. Last of all, he found himself happily insulated from his literary acquaintances by four flights of stairs. The room was now steeped in a comfortable firelight, which picked out the gold figuring upon the backs of his books and lit a deeper glow within the lucent ebony of the Steinway's flanks. The window was open, and through it the rumour of the town came to us as the humming of an immense dynamo, which kindled to a mournful splendour that tawny square of sky.

'Yes, there's a story,' I said. 'You know that I stayed a week at Pont Ishow; but your old friends' waterworks have almost spoilt the fishing; and then I had another drenching time in the Dulas Fechan valley. One doesn't fish for the sake of catching trout. It's a question of "certain jolly humours" isn't it? . . . but you know what rain means in those valleys. For ten days on end it came drifting out of Wales in huge

and melancholy sheets; a mass of cloud crowding at the valley heads, and thinning out to a kind of veil, slung between the opposed ridges, and shutting off the sun. You remember what Giraldus said about the sunshine of that valley?—"the body of the sun does not become visible above the heights of the mountains, even in a clear atmosphere, till about the prime, or a little before." Frankly I had enough of it, for I never saw the body of the sun at all: nor as much as the dawn's fingertips. You may smile at me, when I tell you that the mountain was making me a little restless too. Nothing definite: only the sense of being held in by that roof of rain cloud and those black walls of mountain: a sense of stifling in the apex of a shut triangle. About an arrow-shot broad is that valley. Giraldus again. . . . Even if you can't understand that, you may take it that I was as mad as a buffalo-herd galloping to the salt lick, for a breath of dry air. My lungs and my clothes and my mind were all equally water-logged. "Soppy" is the expressive epithet of the Mile-end Road for the exact state of mind. It is difficult to think of in quite the same terms here; and at last a providential way of escape was offered to me. You know, don't you, that the farmers in the Dulas Fechan valley get their doctoring done for them by a man who lives over the mountain at a village called Felindre, which is in England, by the way? The child of Matthews, the man who kept the inn where I was staying, gave its poor mother a hideous fright by waking up at nine o'clock one night with some croupy, throat-strangling affection, that wouldn't yield to poultices or incantations. (I suspect the grandmother

of nothing less.) Matthews, in the rosy mood of a market evening, had blabbed the fact that there was diphtheria in Aberdulas.

'"You'll have to ride to Felindre and fetch Doctor Meredith," said Mrs Matthews. She didn't leave him any time for argument; the horse was saddled before the poor man had found his boots. There was a hell of a wind blowing that night—very noisy, too, as if the clouds were stampeding overhead in the dark.

'We all sat up waiting in the kitchen. A night of small irritating sounds above the wind's undertone; such as the click of bagatelle balls in the bar next door, and the noise of the old woman shuffling about the room on some unimaginable business; the howling of the gusts in the chimney, and the catch in the breathing of the child, whom Mrs Matthews was hugging to suffocation at her breast. There was a branch of crimson rambler that had been broken loose by the wind, which kept up a horrible syncopated tattoo on the window panes. Four hours later—anyway, after midnight—Matthews, his spirits immensely diluted, arrived with the doctor. Dr Meredith gave me the impression of being about three times the size of his horse. I should think he weighed thirteen stone and the beast was not fourteen hands: you know the sinew of these mountain ponies. He wore one of those square felt hats that have gone out of fashion even with the farmers, and the moisture of the clouds through which they had ridden sparkled on his grizzled eyebrows and moustache. He carried himself very straight. His brows and the line of his mouth and chin were as square as his hat, and he spoke with exactly the kind

of voice that you would expect, smiling rather grimly.

'The old woman took his coat, and he bent stiffly to get his stethoscope out of a tail pocket; one of the old-fashioned wooden kind, like a penny trumpet in wood. There wasn't much bedside manner about Meredith. None of your thermometers either—he just guessed (and rightly, I expect) at the child's temperature with his hand on its forehead. I wonder if you know a silly picture called "The Doctor"—there are prints of it everywhere. Well, this man was just everything that the glossy-bearded sentimentalist in the picture is not. He didn't gloom over the kid with eyes mournfully tender, and unpack its chest like a connoisseur handling porcelain. His hands were like spades. He said: "Get these tapes adrift." And he made the baby howl.

'Then he glowered at the grandmother, and asked her how many children she'd had. Nine? Well, then, she ought to be ashamed of herself for routing a poor man out at night. "Didn't half of them get bronchitis during teething time? And in this weather too!"

'In a moment the room was cheerful. He took a tablet out of a small tube and crushed it in a bit of newspaper with the end of a knife. "There you are now," he said. "Where is that whisky you were talking about, Matthews?" And Matthews asked me to join them.

'"I shall wait for daylight," said Meredith, "before I set back. . . . Do you know the road to Felindre?" he asked me a little later. "It's a good way up, but a bad way down, and on a pitchy night like this you're

liable to find yourself on the edge, or over it, of the Red Daren. A tidy fall for a man of my weight. I'm not so young as I was." He stiffened that poker-back of his as he spoke, and I fancy his mouth went squarer. You never grudge an ageing man the pride of his strength. He asked me to guess his years; and even I was surprised to hear that he had topped seventy. "Labour and sorrow?" he laughed. "Do I look like it? . . . Ha, ha!" Matthews followed his wife to bed, and Meredith and I sat on talking over the kitchen fire, piling on the fierce resinous fir logs and waiting for the light. The old man—I call him that, though he was continually putting a subconscious correction to it—seemed happy to have somebody to talk to. Felindre, he told me, was so remote, as remote even as this lost valley of the Dulas Fechan. He and his wife, of whom he spoke with a sort of tender gallantry, were forced to live very much to themselves. Not that they were without society, but then all the society in the neighbourhood were in the same box as themselves. Hereford, he confided to me, was not a lively city; and London meant a whole day's journey and an immense—immense railway fare. When he was younger they had not known the need of these things, the vigour and freedom of country life and of strenuous work had filled their time to the exclusion of wider interests. Now they both felt that life was slipping away from them at an incredible speed, and that they had missed —so much. His brows seemed to relax and, in repose, the fire lit the tired furrows on his cheeks. Little by little he seemed to be growing very old. And then, quite naturally, we came to confidences. He told me

how his son—his only son, a student in Edinburgh—had committed suicide thirty years before. God knew why. . . . Perhaps the family history on his poor mother's side was not all it might be. "*I* am not neuropathic," he said, with a flash of the old manner. Just before daybreak it became frightfully cold, and we blew the red embers to a blaze and brewed a pot of coffee. It had been a case of liking at first sight with both of us, and when he rode away with his legs stretched out, ludicrously long, on either side of the rat-like pony, he begged me to come and stay with him at Felindre. He would like his wife to make my acquaintance, and, indeed, the village was worth a visit, if only for its historical associations, of which I, no doubt, already knew more than he. I gathered that Matthews had been bragging. Altogether it was a charming invitation.

'Here, then (after an unpardonable digression), was the interposition of Providence which was to ease me from the mixture of drowning and asphyxiation by moisture which I was enduring in the Dulas Fechan valley. As for the historical associations of Felindre—of which I knew nothing except its delightful name—Matthews' gazetteer of the adjacent counties could not aid me any more than Matthews himself, who only assured me that it was a very old place; and, yes, very old-fashioned too. "A miserable village," he said.

'I didn't mind how miserable it might be if only it were dry. So I told Matthews to be sure and leave my bag at Aberdulas when next he drove to market, and set off up the side of the Mynydd Dhu, by the path that pierces the pine woods. To squelch over the sodden

needles was like walking with water in your boots. There was not a breath of air in all the woods, nor any rain that came through in a straightforward manner: only a ceaseless pattering of drops, slipping from the millions of black twigs, and cold lights gleaming through the ways of the wood within still pools and over-garish beds of fungus. Then I burst out into a silence of white cloud—or rather a white loneliness; for the mountain-side was one great gurgle of water, and beneath the felting of cloud you could hear the Dulas Fechan churning itself in a brown spate and roaring over the stony shallows far below. Obviously I was in the thick of the curtain which had roofed the valley, and though the path which led me between the trees had crawled into a sickly watercourse and there escaped me, I knew that I had got to cross the ridge somehow, and went on tacking for the top. Of course I missed my proper pass. Indeed, I must have drifted, with the drifting cloud, quite four miles to eastward, for when I reached the ridge I did not see below me, as I had expected, the wooden church tower of Felindre, but only another sea of cloud. And the mountain fell away beneath my feet to the broken edge of a precipice, which I took for the Red Daren, which the path to Felindre happily misses. I sat down and lighted a pipe on the lee side of a heap of broken turves; for the air was rather shrewd. Somewhere below me I heard the croaking of a pair of ravens, and soon I saw one of those great birds ascend in widening curves. It circled black above me, with angry barks, and gradually vanished again into the upper whiteness. I looked like sticking there for hours, for I dared not

trust my feet to the shelving edge beneath; and then, suddenly, before I realised that the mist was thinning, the whole cloud lifted or scattered. I found myself in a race of little ragged wisps that one might have caught in the hand, hurrying like the stragglers of a flock of sheep, and in front of me and below a vast and gloomy landscape.

'You know how solemnly that mountain builds up from the plain? The country at its feet is, I suppose, one of the most fertile in England, full of sweet and springing green. And then thick woods clothe its sprawling limbs right up to the crown of the foot-hills, where the black line of fir trees ends, and a pale, windy plateau spreads for the whole length of the range, several miles in depth. Above it, the mountain itself rises sheer, with the curl of a black wave—oh, intensely black—into the clouds. From the great height at which I was sitting, I could see no sign of life for fifty or sixty miles—not even the smoke of any village broke the savage monotony of this upland stretch; but at the extreme end of the mountain barrier on which I was perched, the black wave reared its comb to the summit of Pen Dyrion, and there fell away into the dreaming northern plain. Perhaps it was the sudden and silent revelation of that vast brooding expanse that affected me. Anyway it impressed me as something profoundly melancholy. I couldn't conceive of a man living happily under the shadow of those overhanging ridges. The simile of the dark breaking wave recurred to me. It seemed to hover there like a sinister fate over the lost village that I was seeking. Somewhere in that undulant desolation

lay Felindre. I felt suddenly sorry for Meredith and the people who lived there. Of course, it was very silly of me, for Meredith, who had prospered beneath it for forty years, felt nothing of the sort.

'I had calculated pretty accurately the direction of Felindre, but it took me a good two hours to find a way to the level of the high plateau. I managed to get down a sort of path between the Grey Daren and the Red, which was just as scowling as its neighbour, and it was only the support of the dense thickets of bracken that enabled me to keep my feet. When I reached the bottom—remember, I was still some fifteen hundred feet up—the light was failing, and I found that the country which I had taken for an open moor was in reality enmeshed by a network of enclosures, thorn hedges and stone walls, which make straight walking impossible. On one occasion I came to a deep water-course, so smothered in thorny undergrowth that it must have taken me a mile and a half out of my way to get round it. And then it started to pour again; not with that thin mountain drizzle, but a keen pitiless rain that soaked me in ten minutes. I'm used to walking in mountain countries, but I hadn't looked for this devilish maze of entanglements. It struck me that it was useless to go on casting about for Felindre in the dark; I might just as well work straight downwards, and trust to hitting on some farm near the edge of the foot-hills. After all, I reflected, the fields weren't made for nothing, though devil an animal had I seen in that howling wilderness.

'And then I found myself on the edge of a small plantation of firs. They rose up very straight and still

on either side of me, like a company of tall sentinels. They seemed so slimly tall that I looked up at them, and then I saw that their branches were all stripped bare of needles as though the sword of sheet lightning had flickered through them and blistered them as they stood. And beyond the bare top of the plantation, lifted at what seemed an incredible height, a single window glowed in the top of a high tower. No other sign of life; but God knows I was thankful for the least token of friendliness after all my struggles. At first I took it for a church. Only, when I skirted a long barn-like structure which threw itself out from the lower stories of the tower and appeared to be windowless at the back, I came into a small enclosure with a gate and a broad path of flags leading up to the house-porch on the one side and to a doorway in the tower on the other. Here again a window set in this new face of the tower-top glowed like a lantern; but the extended wing, which was of the native sandstone and typical of the farm-house architecture of the district, showed no light—all the shutters were up, as for a funeral. In the middle of the flagged path a child's perambulator had been left, and a string of ghostly washing flapped in the wind.

'That light in the tower-top fascinated me, half-drugged by rain as I was, and in a sort of tired stupor I watched a moving shadow strike across the angle of the room and leave the tower in darkness. Then the same light winked out and vanished through a long slit in the right-hand corner of the building, in another, lower down, and yet another. Somebody was coming down a spiral staircase. A door opened—a lovely

Norman door it was; the lamp threw into relief the dog's-tooth carving of the arch; and the man who carried it seemed very tall; with a black cloak—inverness, do you call them?—over his shoulder. He held the lamp before him, so that he could not see outside. A helpless, unpractical way of doing things.

'"Who's that?" he called. "What do you want?"

'"I'm out of my way in the dark, I'm afraid," said I. "If you can tell me where I am . . ."

'"This is Trecastel," said he.

'"And I'm bound for Felindre."

'"It's a bad road to Felindre and a filthy night. You'd better come in and dry yourself. The rain may clear later." He spoke in a tone that said: "This is a fiendish nuisance, but I can't very well turn you away, can I?" I felt half inclined to ask him for the road, and push on. In the moment of silence I heard a baby crying in the long house.

'"You'd better," he said again very solemnly.

'"Why not?" I hadn't any answer for this question, so I stamped some of the wet off myself, and came to the door, where he stood drooping like an immense dishevelled crow, with the lamp held high in his right hand. Inside, the lamp showed me a room stacked with faggots of wood and smelling strongly of poultry. I heard the birds stirring on their roosts; but the roof was groined, and very lovely. A small door led on to the flight of stone steps down which the light had come winking. He made a motion of excuse for his precedence, and led the way—a very long way it seemed—to the topmost room of the tower.

'I wish that I could give you my impression of the

man with any exactness, but the elusive atmosphere of his setting—I mean those foot-worn steps, the fusty smell of the woodhouse mingled with that of paraffin, which pervaded even the staircase, and all the wild night out of which I had floundered like a moth to the lamp that he held before him, makes the picture so complex. I have told you he was tall, and the fact that he was always three steps in advance of me made him seem taller. The inverness coat which he wore was bunched round his shoulders so that he seemed very broad as well, and his hair curled over the collar at the top, although he was a little bald on the crown. His back view was really not unlike that of many seedy orchestral players—the kind of people you see drifting away from the platform doors of a concert room, with their cases tucked under their arms. His black trousers were rubbed at the bottom, and he wore carpet slippers horribly down at heel. That was all that my limited physical vision could give me on the long journey up. When we got to the top, he put the lamp aside on a table and looked at me shyly.

'"I think you had better have a towel," he said. "A rub down will be the best thing; and I can lend you a few things to throw on while you are drying . . . perhaps."

'I told him that I couldn't think of bothering him, for his tone wasn't very encouraging, and he seemed to jump at my suggestion that I should need only shelter until the worst of the rain was over and he could put me on my way. It would be rather difficult, he admitted, to dry clothes at this—pointing to a sickly paraffin lamp, but it would be wiser to dry my

boots. I suggested the fire of the farm kitchen next door. "Ah, no," he said rather hurriedly, "I think we can manage without troubling them. . . . Oh, yes, we can manage. . . . If you don't mind, I would rather not trouble them."

'He lifted the lamp nervously from the table, where one of its legs stood tilted upon an open book, and placed it upon the top of a small piano. "Won't you sit nearer to the lamp?" he said. "I think I had better make you a hot drink of something, hadn't I? There is a bottle of gin in that cupboard at your right hand. We are rather cramped, aren't we? Would you mind reaching it? Yes—the cupboard under the crucifix."

'I hadn't seen the crucifix. There it hung, a rather rough piece of wood carving, undoubtedly modern, and bad at that. I passed him the bottle, and we heated water above the oil stove in a little saucepan that smelt of egg-shells. Then he settled down in the chair opposite to me, with the lamplight full on his face, and we sat and looked at each other.

'I suppose he was forty, but it's difficult to place that kind of man. At any rate his dark hair was thinning on the top to a kind of natural tonsure. Under certain conditions he might even have been handsome, but now the whole impression that he gave one was something lax and slovenly. No man of his years and figure—the waist was slightly corpulent—has any business to wear a frock coat along with carpet slippers and an inverness cloak. His cheeks, too, were a little puffy, and his forehead a pale expanse—not unlike the dome of Walter Scott. I said he was

slovenly, but he was most carefully clean-shaven, a cardinal point of distinction between him and an average Catholic priest. The nose was straight—but rather too small, the mouth amazingly childish, while the eyes, in orbits which were so deeply caverned as to contradict the general smoothness of his face's contour, were of an intense pale blue—almost the colour of the chicory flower. They were visionary eyes; so mystical that of the three categories which are competing for his summary, I would call him poet rather than musician, and priest rather than either. Perhaps, as you say, the crucifix has something to do with my decision.

'And he sat there sipping his gin and looking through me to the wall behind. It gave one an uncomfortable sensation: I wanted to turn round and see what was there. I felt it useless to ask questions. . . . Yes, he was that kind of man.

'At last he said: "You are going to Felindre?"

'"Yes," said I. "It is a bad road there, you say?"

'"Did I say so? All the roads here are bad."

'"It would be a pity to drag you out on such a night," said I. "One of the men from the farm could put me on my way."

'"The farm?" he queried. I felt an inclination to laugh in his face, it was so solemn. He sat there blinking like an owl in the lamplight.

'"Isn't the long building on the other side of the yard a farm?" I said.

'"No," he told me, "you are mistaken. There is no farming now. It is the newer part of the house. You have never seen it by daylight, or I could explain.

As a matter of choice, I live in the tower—the oldest part of the castle: the keep, in fact."

'"And you live here alone?"

'"Alone. . . . Yes. In the other end of the house there are two women living."

'"And a child." I hurried to explain that I had seen the perambulator in the path, had nearly fallen over it in fact. "Ah, she is very careless, very careless," he said uneasily. "If you will excuse me, I will put it in out of the rain." He shuffled out of his chair: I think he was glad to shirk the necessity of facing me and talking to me. At any rate the glass of hot gin and water which he had poured for himself stood almost untasted. He left me to savour the queer solitariness of the place. And really it was strange, you know, to be sitting in that whitewashed mediæval room, crouched over the miserable heat of a smoky oil stove that stank the place out. I thought of how I myself now represented the intelligence behind that lantern room of light which had lured me out of the darkness. I thought of the ludicrous, moon-faced paunchy person who had received me, shambling out into the wet to push in a child's perambulator. I confess to you I couldn't make the least thing of him. . . . He left me alone so long that I got to examining the room in detail: the little piano, a thing with about as much tone in it as a mandoline; the music case—and here are some surprises for you—a good deal of Bach, Palestrina, and old church music; *Gerontius*, and Franck's *Béatitudes*. What do you think of that? A fairly Catholic taste in one department? But listen. How about the piano score of

Pelléas and Mélisande? He came in behind me as softly as a cat, in his carpet slippers, while I was reading the scene where the lovers go wandering in search of the lost ring. He stood staring at it over my shoulder. "You know that," he said.

'I told him I'd heard the opera, that Mary Garden was a marvellous Mélisande. "It is a terrible thing, terrible," said he in a very low voice. Now you know that pale crepuscular kind of music seems to me too thin to be terrible at all. P'ff, and it's gone. . . . I asked him what he meant by that.

'"I mean the part that isn't written," he said.

'You know I felt quite sorry for him, he looked so owlish, so fantastically forlorn standing there with his great solemn eyes gripping one hand with the other: a queer little gesture that I'd noticed before as though he wanted something to clutch on to—or wasn't sure of himself. And it wasn't only the superficial aspect of him that made me sorry. The idea of a man of culture, so obviously helpless, so immensely isolated, the sombreness of the creature, and that pretty unnecessary journey from the tower into the cold courtyard after the perambulator. The whole string of descents from the sublime to the ridiculous epitomised in his deeply glowing eyes and the ragged edge of trouser above his carpet slippers. Yes, I think it was the idea of futility that impressed me most. He leaned over me, and shut the score, looking a little abashed by his own intense ejaculation, and the sympathy that he had guessed in me. It made him anxious to get clear of the whole subject. "I really came to tell you," he said, "that the rain has

almost stopped. If only it clears a little more you will have a moon to help you. And I am ready to put you on the road as soon as you like."

'He swung on the inverness, took up a black felt hat which made him look more priestly than ever, and stood waiting. He wasn't exactly ungracious any more than a child is ungracious, but it made me smile. I pointed to his carpet slippers. "Surely you're not going out in those," I said. He broke into a rumble of deep laughter, which made him seem more human than before. "I am very forgetful," he said, "and hardly used to country life. . . . One is very lonely here," he went on, "and gets out of the way of social amenities, even decencies. Such hospitality in a Celtic country. . . . Pray forgive me."

'The laugh seemed to have loosened his tongue. He sat down and put on his boots, talking in quite a different tone. He actually asked me where I was going to at Felindre.

'"Miserable village!" he said, echoing Matthews. "I don't know what the inn is like." I told him I was going to the Merediths. "You should have told me that," he said. "Why didn't you tell me? I have a great respect for Dr Meredith. I am sorry if I have been discourteous to a friend of his. But, you know. . . ." He actually stopped doing up his boots —button-boots, mind you—to clasp the fingers of his left hand in his right in that queer, unreliant gesture of his. He never finished the sentence. "Come now, I'm ready," he said. And he gulped off the lukewarm gin and water.

'From the door I saw that there was a light in one of

the upper windows of the house; against the blind there fell the shadow of a woman brushing her hair; and walking along the path with his eyes downcast, my friend nearly came a cropper over . . . the perambulator. He lifted it up very gently, and placed it on one side. I didn't venture a word. Five minutes later I heard him give a deep chuckle.

'"Funny that," he said, and I laughed too. I don't think we said another half-dozen words between us. We struck a path which pierced the spinney of blasted pines, and soon I found that we were on a rough lane that I must have missed somehow—probably I had mistaken it for the bed of a stream—running due north. Every moment the clouds were thinning above us, and soon the moon stole out above the line of the mountain. All the country-side was soft and silvery, and no longer threatening. Do you know, all my Trecastel experience seemed to me a fantastic dream? Even the man walking beside me seemed to have lost some of his attributes; to have become humanised and friendly instead of a macabre abstraction. I didn't look at him, for fear of ruining the new illusion, or, shall I say, awakening the old? At the top of a little rise he stopped.

'"Now you cannot go far wrong," he said. I thanked him. He stood in silence a moment. "It's strange just to meet people for an hour or so in stormy darkness, isn't it?" he said. "Are you staying long at Felindre?"

'I told him that I should not be there more than three or four days. I thought, you know, that he was leading up to an invitation. I hoped so. I was

really very curious. But I don't believe he heard me.

'"Very strange," he repeated. I dared not look at his hands. "That was rather comical about the perambulator, eh?" Again I heard that queer low chuckle of his. And then he slouched off again; never looking where he went. I heard him splashing through the ruts.

'A few minutes later I was aware of a clatter behind me. A high dog-cart was coming up with me, its lamps lighting the narrow lane very brilliantly, and in the dog-cart Dr Meredith. "I didn't think you'd risk it to-day." He hailed me cheerfully, and told me to jump up alongside. I said that I had just come from Trecastel. "The devil you have," he chuckled, "and who entertained you? The fair Judith?"

'I described my moon-faced host.

'"Ah, Alaric," he said. I didn't quite catch the name, and he repeated: "Alaric Grosmont. Matthews tells me that you write books. Now there is a story for you, my friend."'

II

'And naturally,' said Marsden, rising, 'you felt this a sort of challenge to your literary self, your sub-conscious mind, your "little people," or whatever you choose to call them; so that by now you're in a position to offer me a tolerable piece of fiction. Suppose you wait for a few minutes while I make some coffee. I think we'll have a light too.'

I don't know quite how long we had been talking, but I noticed that the room was much darker, and turning my eyes towards the window I saw that the tawny glare had faded from the sky, even the humming of that immense dynamo had subsided, so that small sounds became apparent. We spoke together softly in that chamber lifted high above the city asleep, and it seemed to me as if we were conspirators exchanging confidences. Then Marsden went into the next room to heat the water for the coffee. I closed my eyes for a moment, and suddenly I came upon an impression of Trecastel, as it stood mouldering upon the windy plateau, with the black lines of mountains behind it and below the goblin orchards falling, falling steeply to the plain. A sudden glimpse it was that swamped my whole consciousness. Marsden had switched on the light, and was smiling at me in the queer provocative way he has. There is nothing he loves more than to have something up his sleeve; and even when one has got beyond the enjoyment of

conjuring tricks, it is pleasant to humour him. And this perverse, boyish attitude of mind goes along with a certain directness in him which I admire because it seems to me unattainable.

'Now,' said he, still smiling, 'you shall continue your inventions, unless——'

I cut him short.

'You mustn't think I'm just going to spin a yarn out of mere filmy atmospheres. I've hinted to you that I suddenly found myself up against an extraordinary piece of drama: the kind of thing that is almost too tense for actuality: the kind of situation you dream about.'

'And you met the man—let me see, once? Alaric Grosmont is one of the protagonists, isn't he? He is really important? You haven't rung up the curtain of this drama of yours on two servants dusting the china in the hall? Well, I suggest that it is prudent to get as much flesh and blood into the matter as you can. Candidly, I'm not going to accept your Alaric as he stands, unless, of course, you express yourself as entirely satisfied with him.'

'Certainly I am. What could be better than the setting in which I found him? This very pursy, slightly paunchy, black frock-coated, moon-faced dreamer sulking in his comfortless tower-top, eagerly snatching at the very hollowest subterfuge to get out of my company. I've never met any one who was in the least intimate with him. Even Meredith knew him only as a figure. Can't you let the drama speak for itself? Is there any reason in the world why you shouldn't accept my Alaric as he stands?'

'Well, there is a reason,' said Marsden, slowly sipping his coffee. 'You see . . . well, I happened to know Alaric Grosmont fairly—I won't raise your expectations further than fairly—intimately at one time.'

'I'm not sure whether you're joking. You know it is ruthless to thrust collaboration upon me when the scene is set. You must not play tricks with my story. . . .'

'No,' said Marsden at length. 'I won't do that. It is perfectly true that I did know Alaric. And I have an idea that what I know of him will strengthen your story; though I may tell you right away that I have not the least inkling of what your drama may be. I only know that he was always the kind of man . . . how shall I put it? . . . that his remoteness, except in certain strangely contradictory aspects, from the common cast of humanity, seemed to me to make drama inevitable whenever he should come into contact with those strange currents of passion which take our legs from under us. I fancy even that I saw him embarked upon the voyage that brought him eventually to this strange shipwreck (I am jumping to conclusions) high and dry upon the savage wind-swept shore on which you found him. You must admit that your story places him in a very fantastic setting. And he himself becomes fantastic, a little less human. I don't expect you have exactly conceived him in terms of humanity. With you, I can see it had been an affair of mystery. I can see you engaged with this tall crow-like figure stalking out of the mists, moving in a sort of twilight, " a still strange land, unvexed by sun or stars," or in the magic

moonlight of the wet lane. Now I knew Alaric Grosmont in North Bromwich, which is considerably less romantic in point of fact than—than Campden Hill. You'll admit that I have made a *prima facie* case for collaboration?'

'It's an inadmissible coincidence that you should have known him. Did you really know him? I warn you, you may spoil my story.'

'Not if your story is true. And I did know him; though you may take it from me that the Alaric whom I knew was rather different from your pursy, paunchy, frock-coated mystic. There is no doubt about the man. You made me full of eager guesses when you mentioned that queer trick of his—that indeterminate clasping of the hands. You may say, if you like, that I knew him in another existence: for that is what it amounts to. And as I am going to tell you what I knew about him in a hard, realistic, matter-of-fact way, you shall hear it now, under the stimulus of this coffee, which will help you from relapsing into your dreams; and in the full glare of electric light. That shall be my only contribution to your atmosphere of symbols. And you had better light a pipe. It should console you for the break in the continuity of your romance.

'It was in North Bromwich, as I have told you. At that time I was literary editor of the *Courier*. I see that you smile at the rather pretentious title, and perhaps it has never occurred to you to associate the *Courier* with literature. Well, you should never despise good journalism, and mine was not really bad. With me it was a matter of making a living.

Four pounds a week; and honestly I earned it. It just happened at that time that the *Mail*, our principal rival, had made a big splash in musical criticism by getting Oldham on to their staff: signed critiques, a weekly special, largely quoted elsewhere, and all that sort of thing. And no sooner had the *Mail* started on these lines than the very promising junior who did our musical work let us down rather badly. Somebody did the *Pathetic Symphony* for the first time in North Bromwich. And very few people in the North Bromwich audience, certainly not our hapless junior, had the least idea who Tschaikowsky might be, let alone that the unfortunate composer was long since dead and buried. Here, thinks our musical critic, is a chance to show our independence. So he let off gaily in the best Oldham manner, airily damning the *Pathétique* as a promising work, saying that if the composer (one of these young Russians, you know) stuck to his Beethoven and cultivated a better appetite, took more exercise and attained a hearty Stevensonian point of view, he might do better. Next day the *Mail* had a special on Tschaikowsky's life and work, and our editor came to me in a fearful stew. He begged me to take on the musical criticism. I told him that I didn't know a damned thing about music. I didn't, you know. "But my dear fellow," says he, "only look at this. . . . Look at it. . . . We can't possibly live it down under twelve months!" So I became the *Courier's* musical critic. I enjoyed it immensely. You know how the attempt to master any new subject sets one up. And that is how I came to know Alaric Grosmont.

'Not that I had not noticed him before. Already he was in a way a conspicuous figure in North Bromwich. I suppose several thousand people knew him by sight, though, as he told me later, he had never made a friend in all the twelve years he was working there. In those big provincial towns there are at least three hours in the day when every one sees every one else. Early in the morning, at the dinner hour, and at about five o'clock in the afternoon, the tide of human people hurrying to their offices sets up Sackville Row. I used to watch them lazily from the windows of the *Courier* office. It was quite impressive in its way, to see all the ants in that dirty ant-heap stampeding—their white harassed faces, and their sudden strange intensity. And there, every day, I used to see Alaric. He didn't hurry like the rest. Even then he was tall, moody, black. I think your word " moonlike " will describe his face too. Only your picture is one suggestive of exhaustion, and this Alaric of mine was strong in a reserved sort of way. He looked self-contained, as if the sympathy, the actual consciousness of the people around him, were unnecessary to him. As if they were not there at all. He moved along wearing an inverness cloak in winter, and in summer a black frock-coat, tightly buttoned at the waist—with a queer shuffling movement—not at all decrepit, mind you, but slovenly, as though he were walking in slippers very down at heel. And sometimes—this is a thing I noticed more than once—he would stop dead in his progress, and gaze mildly for several minutes at the tower of the little Renaissance church that they have put right out of the

picture by calling a cathedral. It is really very lovely that tower, though badly served by the smoke. I used to wonder what the chap was thinking about. I became quite interested, in a languid sort of way. I even asked one of our subs if he knew the fellow's name or what he did, but he couldn't tell me, though he, too, knew him well by sight.

'And then, when I started the musical game, I began to see him at concerts. I saw him very often, for he had pitched, as most of us do, on a favourite place in the Town Hall, on the floor, just below the place in the gallery where Oldham used to sit. I often used to watch Oldham as he sat there with his parchmenty, sphinx-like face and the score open before him. I used to wonder what he was thinking up there. To tell you the truth, I was often out of my depth and eager for a hint. And Oldham never gave anything away. Suddenly I would begin to feel that he was conscious of my stare, and then I would drop my eyes and pitch straight down upon the large pale face of Alaric with his deep-set pupils staring at nothing and one hand clasped confidentially in the other. The contrast would make me smile; his was so directly the opposite of Oldham's shrewd, cynical face. You know, personally I am so matter-of-fact that, like most plain-sailing people, I have a weak spot for the visionary. I don't mean the conscious mystic like yourself (I nearly called you the pseudo-mystic), but the thorough-going mystic who is wholly subconscious; and of the two faces the one which attracted me more was Alaric's. I dare say there was an element of pity in it, the conviction that these

people are really a variety of child. Well, I took to watching Alaric closely, and it may seem funny to you when I say that I believe it helped me to get at the heart of a good deal of the music. The influence of his utter absorption was in a way hypnotic, and I surrendered to it so freely that it became almost essential to my enjoyment. I couldn't get on without him. I was even so foolish as to imagine a scientific explanation for it: the idea of a psychical *rapport* established between our two subconscious minds, a kind of slender vibrant thread stretched between his bemused intelligence on the floor and mine in the gallery, acutely sensitive to all lovely waves of sound —oh, and a heap more, the suggestions behind them. Sheer nonsense, you know. The kind of thing you people write about. And eventually I arrived at a state when I didn't even have to know he was there, by the side of the iron pillar beneath Oldham's seat. I took him as a matter of course; and indeed he was as frequent a concert-goer as myself.' Marsden paused for a moment.

'But surely,' I said, 'having established this conjoint organ of receptivity—what was it—a "slender vibrant thread"? (you mustn't be shamefaced about it), it was indelicate, to say the least of it, to seek Alaric's acquaintance upon the plane of everyday communications that you're so proud to inhabit. You were asking for disillusionment.'

'Well,' he replied, 'I was never disillusioned; nor, for that matter, did I seek his acquaintance. I had it thrust upon me through a medium which was as emphatically "everyday" as it could be. It was a

supper of tripe and onions that threw us together. Opposite the Town Hall stands an eating-house that devotes itself to the selling of these grosser dainties after nine o'clock at night. It is a place with quite a reputation of its own, and very much more to my taste after a concert than the adjoining Crotchet Club, where one is apt to be swamped by professional musicians, the vainest and least cultured class of artists, talking musical shop with a view to advertising their own compositions, or performances. Here, in the inner room of Joey's (that was the name of the house), I found Alaric exultant over a steaming dish of tripe and a pint of porter. When I came into the room he looked up with a sort of shy recognition. I couldn't help saying good evening to him, and took my place at the next table. You spoke once or twice about Alaric's hands—that funny indeterminate self-reassuring gesture of his that I had already seen; but did you ever notice the hands themselves? They were the first thing that struck me about him. He had a very broad palm with immense knobbly knuckles, the kind of capable palm that goes to a mechanic or a skilled labourer; and the first phalanx of the fingers was in keeping. And then, do you know, the rest of the fingers tapered off to a tip of unimaginable delicacy: most extraordinarily sensitive finger-tips. He ate like the first part of his hand, and talked like the second. That evening, before we had been talking five minutes, I was faced with twenty contradictions of the same kind. I can tell you I found it fascinating. The concert had finished up with Debussy's *Après-midi d'un Faun*, a silly thing to put at the end of a

programme. I asked him how he had liked it. He smiled slyly. "I am taking an antidote—not too late, I hope,'" he said, and ordered another pint of stout. Two pints: one quart. "Surely it isn't as bad as all that," I suggested.

'"I don't like fauns," said he. "I hate the brutes. They've left some very dirty hoof-marks on literature, don't you think?"

'Now you know, my previous experience—subconscious experience, if you like—of Alaric had convinced me that he did nothing of the sort. In reality I was perfectly sure that he adored fauns, or, at any rate, that he was afraid of them. The man hadn't got those eyes, and that gait and the moon-face and those finger-tips for nothing. I knew that he was just the kind of person whom shadowy abstractions and pagan mysteries and so forth would bowl over. You see, I happened to have been watching him all through the Debussy piece. I'd seen him ravished by that sun-drenched siesta, I'd seen him exult in the sensual mysticism of its atmosphere. And now he was extinguishing the flame that Mallarmé had kindled (we'll leave the composer out of it) with wet blankets of tripe and libations of porter. He wasn't quite sure of himself. He began to talk with enthusiasm on the matter in hand.

'"To cook tripe properly," he said, "it should be brought up to the boil several times, and replaced each time in cool water. Then it wants a *bouquet garni* and some peppercorns and a glass of white wine on the top of it, and a good twenty-four hours simmering. Then it's fit to eat. You can scrap the onions."

But, good Lord, didn't he just eat it as it was! "I see you don't want to talk about music," I said, "but you're evidently very keen on it all the same."

'He said: "Yes, he was very keen on music—Bach and Beethoven, you know." It was all ridiculous. He wasn't a Bach-Beethoven-Brahms man at all. Then, as an afterthought, he let me into the secret. "I distrust it, you know," he said. And that seemed to dry him up. He became stolid, ponderous, and uncommunicative to the degree of bearishness. He even went out without saying good-night to me.'

'On the whole, then, you fared very little better than myself,' I said rather triumphantly.

'That was only our first meeting,' Marsden went on. You see, what I am going to tell you will be in the best sense of the word a collaboration. In that little picture of yours, Trecastel clinging to the bare hill-side with the gloomy mountain behind it, and the Alaric whom you met in the bare tower-top, you have given me a most valuable suggestion. If you'd shown it me on a map, it would have been just as valuable. Until this evening I did not even know what country Alaric came from. I had even imagined him a north-countryman. Now I know that he was a Silurist.'

'A Silurist? What on earth do you mean?'

'But surely you, as a literary man, are acquainted with Henry Vaughan—the poet of "Silex Scintillans."'

'Ah!—Vaughan the Silurist. . . . Yes, of course.'

'Exactly. You accepted the word as just one-half of a cliché, never dreaming of its psychical significance. Henry Vaughan was born on the fringe of those same Welsh marches. That is where he got his nickname

from. But he wasn't the only Silurist by a long way. The Herberts of Cherbury were tinged with the same complaint; and so was the Rev. Thomas Traherne of Hereford. And Henry Vaughan had a brother Thomas a parson in Brecon, who wrote treatises on Astrology . . . another of them. Silurism, a well-informed encyclopædia would tell you, is a disease which seems to be sporadically endemic along the mountainous fringe of the Welsh marches. It has affected numbers of all the generations that lie between the poet of the *Flaming Heart* and the author of *Hieroglyphics*. With Alaric Grosmont, as usual, I'm afraid it was congenital. And this knowledge, as I've already told you, helps to explain quite a number of points that I had observed without understanding; for I got to know Alaric Grosmont a good deal better than you imagine. I suppose I met him once or twice in each month for several years, and nearly always under the same circumstances, in the inner room of Joey's. It was only occasionally that he betrayed the mystical elements in his mind, and then, I think, by accident; or by a too vehement negation, which comes to the same thing. He was not anxious, as you may think, to conceal from me the existence of these leanings of his; he wasn't even ashamed of them, he wished to hide them from himself. I tell you, the man's whole life was spent in a gigantic solitary self-deception. All by himself he was fighting against himself, trying to submerge the emotional, mystical, fallible (he would have called it) temperament with which he had been gifted, by a sedulous cultivation of everything material. The ruling principal in Alaric Grosmont's life as I

knew him, was fear—fear of himself, fear of the things which all Silurists are afraid of. I'm not a Silurist. I don't even know what they are. But we talked a good deal, and on an infinity of subjects. "Do you know, Marsden," he said to me one night, "I have been meditating to-day on Courage." Courage, you know! And then I found out that this amazing person was in the habit of setting himself some grave abstract subject, the kind of single-barrelled blunderbuss subject that riddles all the philosophies, to reflect upon, every twenty-four hours. He looked upon it as a sort of discipline. "My mind is very unmethodical," he said; "I find it difficult to apply myself to anything definite, increasingly difficult." He told me that while he lay fathoms deep in contemplation of Hope or Strength or Chastity, or some other inestimable quality, his mind would suddenly be filled, to the exclusion of everything else, with some strange, unremembered picture: a flaming gorse bush tossing on the brow of a hill-side road, a company of silver birches standing still in the gray of evening, a dazzling billow of cumulus cloud. And then Strength or Hope or Chastity would go by the board. I expect, you know, that experiences of this kind explained the moments in which I had seen him stand up like a boulder in the foot traffic of Sackville Row, staring at St Clement's tower. And however carefully he carpeted the threshold of his consciousness with sound, utilitarian linoleum, the "sublimal uprushes," as you would call them, must burst through. "Can't help it," he would say, with the inevitable clasping of hands and a really pained expression in his eyes.

"It seems to me a weakness," he complained. I suggested to him that it was the state in which the best poetry was usually written. He only shook his head. I put it: Didn't his attitude betray a lack of humour? That suggestion really nettled him. Humour was part of his gospel; a cumbrous, heavy, elephantine humour. He admired the humour of Falstaff, of Beethoven, of Rabelais. And in Gargantua, I fancy he swallowed great draughts of poison under the delusion that he was sipping an antidote. It was I who, rather innocently, put him on to Rabelais; for he struck me, in some lights, as a Rabelaisian figure. In fact, I believe I introduced him to a good deal of music and literature at one time and another. Sometimes he would announce to me, very naïvely, his own discoveries. Things that you and I have taken for granted all our lives would move him to strange enthusiasms. One evening he confided to me that he had been reading Wordsworth. He came to me full of the *Lines written above Tintern Abbey*. The solidity of Wordsworth's reputation (Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, you know) had convinced him that he was at liberty to enjoy them. He was crazed over the "splendid sanity" of Wordsworth's poetry; he said that he felt happy and sure of himself when he was reading it, and I chuckled to watch him smack his lips over the forbidden fruit.

'One evening when we had been talking very late over our supper at Joey's, he invited me, with a most surprising confidence, to walk home with him to his rooms. I didn't know where he lodged. I didn't even ask him. We walked slowly the length of Sackville

Row, and boarded one of the cable trams (I believe they have scrapped them now) that used to run more or less intermittently through the lower quarters of the city, to the suburb of Winsworth. We got off at the end of the penny stage, and penetrated a queer, ill-lighted part of the town that I had never visited before.

'You do not know North Bromwich—such is your good fortune—but these low-lying districts of the city have rather an extraordinary atmosphere of their own. They were built, I suppose, at the beginning of the last century, when first the hardware trade began to boom in the Midlands. And they were built in the spirit of the time—with a sort of conscious ugliness, mile after mile of regular smoky brick, and hardly a sign of life upon the street front. On that night they seemed utterly deserted, endless, echoing, as though a plague had devastated the quarter. The faces of those houses were like the faces of the men who built them as they appear in the execrable portraits of the time. You know those secretive, whiskered faces, with cold eyes that stare cruelly out of early Victorian daubs, and you imagine the lives of the men who owned them, as hard as the ironware that they made—lives devoted to the relentless extinction of beauty, loveless and devilishly proud of their lovelessness; you think of the material triumph to which the sin against beauty carried them—that last slow triumph through their endless ugly streets; the final ugliness of the waxen flowers in glass cases; the hideous tossing of black plumes; the black-coated mutes who followed after; the family vault. And while

I was thinking of all these things with a sick distaste, we came to a little square, the existence of which one would never have suspected in this plague-stricken warren; and in the middle of the square a small Georgian church, that might have been copied from a vault itself, rose up amid a graveyard packed with Georgian dead. The square was very badly lighted, and all round it the dull, squat houses crouched like—yes, they were just like mutes themselves. I'm not very sensitive to this sort of thing as a rule, but the uncompromising materialism of that period makes death, and principally the obscene pageantry of death, very horrible to me. I'm not averse from thinking that all flesh is as grass and as the flower of grass, but the essence of the Victorian funeral strikes me as a last desperate adulation of the flesh. I hate it.

'"I live over on the other side of the square," said Alaric. "It's nice and open, isn't it?" It was the first word that either of us had spoken since we left our bright supper-room. "Isn't it rather depressing?" I suggested. No, it had never struck him that way. I'm glad it hadn't. But wasn't it extraordinarily pat to the melancholy colour of the man that he should have chosen this horrible place to live in? First this deadly square, and then your desolate Trecastel? Do you wonder that the cries of dishousled, tortured beauty were always dinning in his ears, even though his serious brain, deafened by the claims of Courage, Strength, or what not, resented their intrusion, was even irritated by them? "I take very little notice of the church," he said. "The parson, I'm glad to say, has never called on me, and I believe it is generally

empty. You know, I distrust a mystical religion, like Christianity. My father was religious——' And then he stopped dead. "It's a nice quiet square, you know," he went on. "There are only two shops here, the pawnbroker's and the second-hand furniture place in the corner, behind which I live." On Saturday nights he said, it was really picturesque. They held a sort of market there, and the people who swarm in the closed courts behind the Victorian houses buzzed round the butcher's naphtha flares like blowflies on carrion. But the market made rather a mess, he complained. Even then I could smell the cabbage stalks rotting in the gutter. The way to his room led through the furniture shop itself—there was no other door to the house. That place, too, if you'll believe me, was full of musty Victorian furniture. It stank of horse-hair and mahogany. And the stairs up which we climbed smelt of dust—immemorial dust.

'Alaric was quite proud of his room. He explained to me that he was almost completely isolated; for the room below his was stored with furniture which they would never sell, old rusty bedsteads and that sort of thing, and formed with his own a sort of wing or rather a tail, pushing out into the blank brick yard behind. "I have outer walls on three sides of me," he said, "and when the wind gets up at nights I can almost imagine myself lodged in a high tower among windy hills." Now I know what he meant by that. The image of the tower did indeed obsess him. He had lately picked up a book of sonnets in black letter, attracted more, I think, by the black letter

than by the sonnets, and there he had pitched upon a phrase which held him. He quoted it to me :—

'For man has sped his instinct to outgo
The step of science, and against her shames
Imagination stakes out heavenly claims,
Building a tower above the head of woe.'

"Isn't that an excellent figure?" he said. "The first part of it is a sad heresy, though. Shames of science indeed!"

'I will tell you something about his room. I had expected that a man with his tastes would have accumulated books, but there were very few, and most of them carried the labels of the city library. I had expected music, and the little study piano, with which I suspect you have already made acquaintance, blocked the corner. Above it, carefully tethered to a hook in the wall, hung a French horn. He took my smiles very solemnly. He had bought it, he told me, for a ridiculously small sum from his landlord, who regularly made purchases at sales in all the dingy houses round, although he never appeared to sell anything. "And you actually play it?" I asked. Yes, he actually played it. The horn, he said, quoting Berlioz, was a noble and melancholy instrument. I commend the picture to you: our solitary friend playing the French horn, sitting alone in his bare room over the stock at the back of the second-hand furniture shop. In a frock coat.

'He asked me if I'd noticed what a little rat of a man the first horn in the North Bromwich Symphony

Orchestra was. He had always remarked, he said, the very insensitive type of man who plays brass instruments in our orchestras. He doubted if that rat, for instance, realised his æsthetic importance in the scheme of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. Very well, then, he had determined to explore the possibilities of emotional expression in French horn playing. It was impossible to take him as seriously as he took himself. We sat there, the two of us, far into the night, in damnably uncomfortable chairs; and as the time wore on he began to tell me a number of shy confidences. He told me, first of all, that he was a solicitor's clerk in the office of Wilburn & Wilburn, one of the biggest, and certainly most conspicuous, houses in the place; and that he held there a subordinate position of the very least importance. I think he got about thirty shillings a week. He loathed Wilburns'. He hated the work, he couldn't find any interest in it; for Wilburns, you must understand, were a firm who never touched anything so shady as a criminal case (until considerably later in the story); they contented themselves with will-making, conveyancing, mortgages, and all the little niggling businesses over which these people are licensed to breed us. I put it to him, then, that a man of his capabilities was wasted in Wilburns' office. You see, the thing came to me as an immense surprise . . . this picturesque person. . . I wondered if he had ever thought of the Bar as a career, his appearance alone would have made him a reputation, but he protested that he hadn't the least practical instinct, that he could always see two sides to a question, that it was temperamentally (not morally)

impossible for him deliberately to see things out of proportion—most of all he loathed responsibility. He suspected that on a venture of that kind he would succeed; he knew that success would excite him, make him less sure of himself, and he feared that it would rob him of his freedom. That was the word he used to express an eight hours day of incomparable dullness, and thirty shillings a week.

'"If you knew me," he said, "and if you knew the family temperament, you would approve of what I say." He spoke for a little while about his father. "There," he said, "was a man whom a romantic environment killed; a man who let his unfortunate temperament"—always temperament!—"run away with him. A man who was always passionately seeking pleasure—not the grosser forms of pleasure, nothing of that sort—and whining because he couldn't attain it. A man with soaring romantic ambitions"—Alaric's lip curled—"which inevitably brought him back to earth with a bump, protesting, in a dazed sort of way, against the injustice of his failure." That was the atmosphere, he sighed, in which he was nurtured from the day of his ridiculous baptism, until the time of his father's death—a miserable death—and his own escape. But he couldn't escape the fantastic brand of his name any more than he could escape the influence of the early years spent with his father—an emotional megalomaniac, he called him—under the shadow of the mountain and the high tower of Trecastel, neither of which he ever mentioned. Why didn't he mention Trecastel or the mountain? You know they must have been always in his thoughts, and, looking

backward, I can disentangle a hundred masked allusions from his talk. His imagery always circled back into the remote and misty; he was obsessed by wind and clouds and high solitude, even in that deadly low-lying slum of his.

'We talked the matter over seriously. I told him that I thought it was the business of every one of us to express ourselves. I suggested that his thorough-going materialism shouldn't allow of him being frightened of a name; that his position resolved itself into absurdity if he once admitted its influence. He allowed me that, and then went on to talk about his brother. There, he said, was a man who should have managed to escape his extravagant destiny. To begin with, he was reasonably christened. Charles was his name. He was fond of sport—riding, hunting, and innocent of all pleasures that were not purely physical; a frank, hearty animal with no more artistic or mystical perceptions than a wild pony. And only a little time before he had heard that Charles, too, had embarked on an extravagance worthy of his father. He had done a wild, strange unaccountable thing. Just the sort of thing, in fact, of which Alaric himself was afraid. He hadn't suspected anything of the sort in Charlie. It showed him, more than ever, that he must be careful of himself, and be contented with a manner of life in which he was comparatively safe. He didn't tell me what this strange freak of his brother's might be. He only held it up as a misty, lurid example of the kind of thing which he was determined to avoid.

'I'm not sure if it is an advantage in a struggle of this kind to be so overwhelmingly conscious of the

opposing forces. They were never out of his mind. The man's complete isolation from the outside interests of humanity—for I don't think he had another friend than myself—the actual mechanical nature of his work, which made his eight hours in the office a daily period of hypnotism, must have allowed his intuition to develop these fears all the time he was not actively fighting them. It is a nice point in psychology, and I never had any further opportunity of investigating it.

'Why? . . . Because, after that long night's talk in the back room over the furniture store, Alaric deliberately avoided me. I can't tell you why. Do you know, the man actually changed his seat in the Town Hall on concert nights, unless indeed he forswore music altogether. I never again saw him at a single symphony concert. I never saw him again in the supper-room at Joey's. For two years, at least, I never spoke a word with him, though I often saw him, as I have told you, from the high windows of the *Courier* office in Sackville Row, moving slowly among the hurrying streams of business men, pausing to stare mildly at the church-tower with one hand clutching the other, and his big face uplifted. I used to smile when I saw him there. But, you know, it rather nettled me, this queer avoidance of me. It was so damned silly.

'And then came the Wilburn sensation. I don't suppose you ever heard of it in London, or wherever you were then; but in North Bromwich no one was talking of anything else at the time, and it carried my mind back to our friend Alaric just when I had nearly forgotten him. I've told you that Wilburn & Wilburn

was one of the oldest firms in the place. The younger partner had died luxuriously at Davos, and Ernest Wilburn was running the whole business off his own bat. Rather a pompous, fussy party, Ernest Wilburn. He always wore a white waistcoat, you know—a clean one, with a fresh set of buttons, every day. And he bred prize carnations. "Carnation Wilburn" they called him at the Union Club. Well, just at that time Wilburn had made a great splash by presenting the Art Gallery authorities with a whole series of Madox-Jones' cartoons—washy, sickly, lackadaisical pictures they seemed to me. Everybody was going to see the Wilburn collection, boasting of their long connection with the firm, making guesses at the amount of Ernest's income. And then Wilburn got up one morning, bathed, changed the buttons in his waistcoat from turquoise to gun-metal, and shot himself. The usual business: misappropriation of trust funds. I happened to be in the *Courier* office when the telephone message arrived. Scott, the senior reporter, was at the telephone. He shouted out to me "Wilburn's committed suicide," and I said "Poor old Alaric!"

'I wasn't exactly thinking what I said. The words slipped out anyhow. I didn't realise that this meant the break-up of the firm, but I don't suppose that Carnation Wilburn himself knew how far out of his depth he was floundering. He'd just gone on treading water for years, hoping that some happy wave would wash him in again. But the details showed a most heartbreaking smash. The creditors appealed to the Council for the return of the wretched Madox-Jones'

cartoons. Sir Joseph Astill, the brewer, made a speech that is unique in the whole history of art criticism. You must remind me to show it you some day. The firm of Wilburn & Wilburn simply ceased to exist. Alaric was out of a job.

'After that I did not ever see his daily progress down Sackville Row. I fancy he must have sulked in his lodgings. Who could you expect to employ such an odd specimen as Alaric Grosmont with only the name of Wilburn to recommend him? In all those years of arid drudgery he had acquired a sort of steady momentum, and I imagine he must have gone lumbering on in the same stolid way, meditating on Thrift, Honesty, Starvation, or other appropriate subjects, playing the French horn and struggling against the devils of intuition. It must have been a duel fought in pitchy darkness. I felt that Alaric's chances were very thin. And then, one day, the sub-editor, whom I had once questioned about Alaric in the days before I knew him, told me, quite casually, that he had been to St Chad's, a ritualistic church not very far from Alaric's slum, and there, in cassock and surplice, carrying a great cross and looking more extraordinary than ever, he had seen our friend. I wasn't exactly surprised to find the Silurist coming into his own, but I'll admit myself immensely interested. It didn't quite seem like playing the game, or, I assure you, I should have visited St Chad's the very next Sunday. I guessed that Alaric had gone under; that he was trying to swamp one ecstasy by indulging in another. You see, I realised so poignantly the legions of devils (as he thought them) against which he was fighting,

and the fact that his only safeguard was removed. So much ado about nothing, you will say; but to him they were so real, those devils. And I think too, that the mysticism of your High Church is most appropriate in a sordid environment such as that of Alaric's slum. It is on all fours with the corresponding problem in literature: the distinction between classic and romantic art. Poetry seems, just as does life, to struggle for a precious mean. If you have wild imaginative flights, you instinctively weight yourself with the sandbags of realism. And the converse is true in life as in literature. The sordid realism, the degradation if you like, of slum life finds its corrective in the elevations of a mystical religion. It is only the very poor or the very rich, both classes steeped in materialism, who fill the High Churches. Alaric, I believe, carried a great gilt cross, and put on ridiculous vestments, almost against his will, partly because he was born a Silurist, and partly because he was utterly weighed down by the dustiest experience. If he had taken to poetry or women or drink, I should not have been surprised. He adjusted himself delicately to circumstances.'

Marsden came to a long pause. I wondered if he had finished his story, and so I put him a question which had been bothering me.

'You mention women,' I said, 'and that makes me curious.'

'I can tell you nothing,' he replied. 'I don't think we ever even talked about women. If ever we did, I am sure Alaric would have changed the subject. Women, I imagine, or rather love, came under the category of

the other things that I mention. All of them were forbidden fruit. He simply didn't trust himself. And Alaric, mind you, was appallingly shy. I never had a hint of any romance. As for unromantic relations—I imagine. . . . And yet I don't know. I believe his shyness would have been an insuperable bar. You've no idea how shy he was . . . no idea. And I can't help feeling that a man so thoroughly abnormal as Grosmont would appear ridiculous in a woman's eyes: for women are as sedulous in their search for the normal as public schoolboys. I find it difficult to think of Alaric making love to any "not impossible she." That he should be in love seems the simplest thing in the world. It would be a vastly entertaining study with possibilities—probabilities of terror intermingled. That he should be happy in love is unthinkable, for I don't think he was happy in anything. He had more of Hamlet in him than most of us, with just those physical disadvantages which would make the part bathetic. I shouldn't wonder if that is your story. Does it really finish with the perambulator?'

We laughed, and then I asked him if he had ever seen Alaric again.

'I saw him once,' he said—'six months, I suppose, after the Wilburn smash. Those six months had taken it out of him. His clothes—the same frock coat—were dreadfully shabby. His big face was thin; the eyes a little cavernous, and his chin unshaven. He would have made an excellent sandwich-man. His gait and his manner were just the same, though it had never struck me before how well suited were both to that calling. I saw that he had recognised me, but

even then he would have passed me by if I had not taken hold of his arm and forced him to speak. I asked him where he was going to, and he said "God knows." He was still in his lodgings, though most of the books and furniture, including the French horn, had long ago been re-absorbed into his landlord's stock. "A nice man," he said, "but far gone in consumption. He allows me to have the use of them until he can sell them." He had been answering advertisements in the *Courier* for "Smart Young Men," and nobody would look at him. You see he could do nothing well—not even French horn playing—and his ill-omened face, coupled with that ill-omened name of Wilburn, did for all his chances. He had tried addressing envelopes till he developed writer's cramp. He had written a novel—I should like to have read that novel. He had done a dozen extraordinary things. and all without the very least success. When I suggested, rather lamely, for I didn't know what I could do, that I might help him, he broke away from me, almost angrily. "Oh, for God's sake, leave me alone," he cried. "I think I know what I shall do," he went on. "I can't stand this place any longer. I'm beaten. I shall have to face it like the rest of us. I shall go home.'

'A queer climax to his tale of sufferings! "Then you always had this last resource behind you? You could always have gone home?" I said. "Yes, I could always have gone home. Don't you understand? I would as soon go to Hell. I detest my brother."

'He moved on without another word. He didn't even look at me. I was sorry, because I wanted him to

come to supper with me at Joey's—just once more. I never saw him again.'

We sat in silence for several minutes.

'So your story ends there?' I said.

'And yours begins—yes. But we must leave it for another day. Do you know that in another hour the workmen's trams will come jangling in? I will draw the curtains over the window, and you shall turn in on the sofa. We have sat the fire out, you see.'

Before he said good-night, Marsden paused at the door. 'Do you know,' he said, 'I have a most ridiculous verse running in my head—"Childe Alaric to the dark tower came"?'

'Yes,' said I, 'but what do you think he found?'

III

I SUPPOSE it was two or three nights later that we met again, for even as the editor of an evening paper Marsden is a busy man, and the story had to wait his leisure. During all those days I lived very much to myself, for scarcely any of my friends seemed to be in town; and throughout the long walks that I took—in Richmond Park, where the beeches were aflame and Nature flaunting her charms in your face like a brazen hussy, down by the river walk at Chiswick, or over the littered pavements of Soho—I seemed as if I could never shake myself free from the overwhelming consciousness of Alaric Grosmont. Alaric rode me like an incubus at night, and in every moment of my day-dreams. Even when I was wideawake, the beggar was never far away. The strange thing was that he carried his atmosphere with him, or, to put it more precisely, that I couldn't get him clear of his atmosphere. Imagine anything more ridiculous than raising one's eyes in Richmond Park, all dressed in homely russet, to meet the frown of black mountain ridges, or than listening for the thunder of the Dulas Fechan among its boulders upon the tow-path at Kew. But that is what I did. And in Soho I suppose I saw Alaric himself, or rather the back view of Alaric, twenty times. This was perhaps more congruous, but when he came slouching from behind a vegetable stall in Little Earl Street, right up to my shoulder, he did take my breath

away. This Alaric I took the trouble to follow. According to the stage doorkeeper he plays the *cornet à piston* at the Palace. I suppose the yeast of story-making was fermenting within me. If you like to carry the figure further, my brain was full of bursting bubbles.'

'Those nights in London were very lovely, with a hint of mountain chillness in the air, just the earliest cool kiss of autumn; and all the time, out of Mrs Meredith's prattle and Marsden's story of the North Bromwich days and my own experience at Trecastel, the shadowy figures of the drama were emerging from their misty setting into clearer air. To Marsden I was indebted immensely. I told him so when we met at dinner, within a stone's throw of the place where I had encountered Alaric the cornet-player. If only it had been a French horn!

'I'm glad I've helped you,' he said. 'Now we can go straight ahead. We start with Alaric's return to Trecastel, the rather wan, irritable Alaric who left me at the street corner.'

'No,' said I, 'you have rather ruthlessly interrupted my plan of the story. I'm glad that you have. And now you, too, must wait. What about the father whose life was Alaric's moral *memento mori*? What about Charlie, the devil-may-care hard rider whom Alaric hated? There is a lady too. And a perambulator?'

'Mrs Meredith is our authority on these matters. You must hear what she has to say. And if you have anything in common with me you will fall in love even with the shadow of Mrs Meredith that I can give you. Those people were awfully kind to me. From the very

minute when old Meredith picked me up in his high gig in that watery lane leading from Trecastel to Felindre to the time when I left them, I was uniformly happy. You would expect people who had lived so much out of the world as these two, and, what is more, felt their isolation, to have become self-centred, inelastic. You mustn't forget either that both of them were old; Mrs Meredith perhaps ten years younger than her husband Simply to live with them was a joy, for their relations with each other were so admirable. He, with his stiff Colonel-Newcomish back, tempered by the rarest humanity—he couldn't have lived fifty years in a practice of that kind without being humane—and she, with her perfect understanding of his adorable stiffness, teasing him, often enough, and sometimes deliberately scandalising him too. He had never quite learned not to take her seriously; perhaps it didn't quite agree with his old-fashioned ideas of courtliness. And she loved him most, I believe, when she had shocked him most, and when he began to scold her for her gossiping ways. Her gossip was the best part of her. She could talk picturesquely of the most common things. I don't mean that she embroidered them, but that she had a marvellously accurate eye for significant details. Her charm lay in the expression of little things . . . a sort of divine small-talk, and any amount of humour—not always conscious, I will admit. And with it all she was so charmingly young, with her white hair drawn back plainly from the brows and the most childish gray-blue eyes—about the colour of a kitten's before they go green. She dressed, too, in a delightfully old-fashioned way, with a sort

of stock arrangement of ribbon round the neck above a waistcoat (or whatever women call them) of flowered satin. She wasn't nearly as tall as her husband. Naturally it was not long before we came to the subject of Trecastel. At the breakfast-table next morning she gave me a lead.

'"You actually sheltered at Trecastel," she said.

'That "actually" was a challenge, you know. I told her that Alaric Grosmont had been only too glad to shelter a friend of her husband's. The doctor stiffened his back. He'd done nothing to merit their esteem, he declared.

'"You know them well?" I asked. "I expect they're old friends of yours."

'"They are patients," said Mrs Meredith—oh, very provocatively. "I always visit the doctor's patients." She generally called him "the doctor."

'Old Meredith made a restless movement with his long legs under the table. "Really, Constance,' he said, "you are bound to give our guest a wrong impression if you talk like that." The dear woman actually blushed when he called her Constance. "The heartless way in which you women can take away other women's characters, by simply . . . simply by insinuations of that kind, amazes me. It amazes me! It's very rough on people, very rough!"

'"My dear George," she protested, "I didn't say that other people didn't call on the Grosmonts." And then, very sweetly, "But they don't, dear, do they?"

'"At any rate, I don't suppose our friend here is in the least interested in people whom he doesn't know,

and is never likely to know. Now Trecastel itself might very well interest you. I should really like to see over Trecastel with you some day, for there must be many curious things in it that I expect you will know much more about than I do. I understand very little of antiquities in the district, you know, but I've a strong feeling, a very strong feeling, that they ought to be preserved. In my surgery I have all the bound volumes of the County Antiquarian Society's records. Very interestin' readin' they are. Had them bound in calf. But Trecastel's a place with a long history."

'"Trecastel is not a nice house," said Mrs Meredith. "I'm perfectly convinced that it's damp. It's almost sunless. There's a little brook trickling through the courtyard. And it's far too old to be healthy. I believe, George, that it was damp, and not you, that killed old Mr Grosmont. You can say what you like." She turned to me. "Have you noticed how delightfully sunny we are here? This breakfast-room faces due south, and the soil beneath us is some kind of gravel or other. I should die for want of sun in Trecastel."

'The old man went out on his round, apologising for not taking me with him. He was riding, he told me, to one of the mountain farms at the head of the Dulas valley. "My wife will entertain you," he said, "but you must not believe everything she tells you. A terrible gossip! *Cum grano*, you know, *cum grano*." He shook his head over her.

'And so I was left in that sunny breakfast-room—due south, you will remember—looking out over the doctor's rose garden, which stretched away for twenty yards or so to a privet hedge that overhung the Felindre

brook, a pretty, musical little river, very different from your Black Dulas. The windows were thrown open, letting in great floods of warm air, and of light, and of the warm scent of sweet brier; and the lace curtain was sometimes stirred by a puff of soft wind, so that its filagree shadow danced black upon the blistered casement. It was all heavenly restful after the black night at Trecastel and the soaking days in the Dulas valley, and not so silent as either of those places, for the air was full of leisurely country sounds —the creak of a cart in the lane, the tinkle of the blacksmith's anvil, the purring of the pigeons on the stable roof. I sat there smoking my pipe until Mrs Meredith came in from the kitchen.

'"Well?" she said.

'"I want you to tell me about Trecastel."

'"I know you do." She put her finger to her lips. "Then we must talk in whispers." That was the way in which we used to flirt, the old lady and I.

'"The doctor told you that it is Norman. But I'm led to understand that you know more about these things than we do." I shook my head.

'"On the surgery bookshelf you will find the *Transactions of the County Archæological Society*. Very interesting reading. But I shall have to lend you a paper-knife to cut the pages with." We smiled together, and then she settled down to tell me all she knew.

'Trecastel, it appears, was actually one of the great border castles built upon the Brecon March—long before the days of Owen Glyndwr—to keep an eye upon the border Welsh. I suppose that march is about the most romantic patch of country in England; for

whole centuries it was drenched in the blood of a warfare almost unrecorded in history. Scott tried to transplant the atmosphere of his own border to Powys —you remember the Garde Doloureuse of *The Betrothed*?—but the struggles of this march were quite another thing: they involved the existence of a dying nation. And Trecastel, mind you, was an outpost long before the Normans came. There is Roman work a very little way from its walls. There's a Roman road that sets off with a fine show of courage on the Welsh side of the Wye, but as soon as it sights the black line of the mountain the thing peters out miserably, comes to an ignominious full stop. You can see it on the map. It didn't ever reach the earthworks of this castellum. And just in the same way the Norman castle, so well built that it left Alaric his tower-top, rose up like a rock far out at sea. The arrows of the Archenfield were behind it, within a beacon's call, but what was the use of beacons when waves of Silurian clansmen swelled between? A lonely tower, wave-washed in a sea that was never calm.

'That was the Grosmonts' inheritance. They were there when Bawldwin preached the crusade with Giraldus at his elbow. And God knows they must have been a sturdy lot, to persist through so many bloody wars. Here is a new aspect for your friend Alaric. How does he strike you as a border baron? Why, he hasn't even a Norman nose! I commend him to the scientists as a type modified by environment, the final example of the fittest survivor. Poor Alaric. . . .

'Mrs Meredith had it all pat. She was perfectly appreciative, you know, of all the romance, the rusty

armour, and that sort of thing in the picture; but, I think, most of all, she was sorry for these poor Grosmonts mouldering away in their embattled tower, mouldering away long after there had ceased to be any work of the kind for which evolution had specialised their shoulders, the wielding of battle-axe and broadsword. "It isn't as though they had even a tree to fell," she said. "Just twenty or thirty acres of indifferent pasturage. *The crook and the pipe and the kid.* They were never meant for farmers."

'Yet farmers they became. And Alaric's father, by Mrs Meredith's showing, must have been one of the worst farmers that ever existed. "He bred really true," she said, "physically, at any rate. Just what my kittens won't do." She had a childless woman's passion for animals.

'"Old Mr Grosmont," as she called him, must have been a wonderful figure of a man; tall—taller even than the doctor—with a hooked nose, and cruel brown eyes like a kestrel's, the kind of eyes that should flash through a visor. She never saw him without thinking of Marmion, having been brought up on Scott's poetry and Byron, in five volumes, with the sixth, *Don Juan*, burned. Old Mr Grosmont—she never knew him as a young man—was a fine horseman. He had a rare extravagance of language, an enthusiasm for history, combined with a really intimate knowledge of his own ancestry. "I think,' said Mrs Meredith, "that all young people were much more romantic in our day than in yours. He was deeply interested in heraldry and that sort of thing. He even carved a set of heraldic shields for the hall at Trecastel—such a funny thing in

a farm-house!" And he used to hunt, she told me, on an immense weight-carrier, nearly seventeen hands, far too heavy for a mountain country, you know, on the back of which he looked like a knight astride of a war-horse. "Oh, he was a very handsome man. He and the doctor were quite the handsomest in the country-side." And then, it appears, "old Mr Grosmont" rode his hobby like a charger. He got his head —one of those round Norman heads—turned by all the chivalrous and romantic nonsense with which he had been stuffing it.

'Even when the Merediths first came to live at Felindre, there was a considerable legend of "old Mr Grosmont's youth. "Quixotic,' the country-side called him; meaning, merely, that he had made himself ridiculous by trying to live outside his century. Quite by accident, or rather by a habitual misuse of the word, they had hit on the right epithet. Old Mr Grosmont *was* quixotic. Not merely a figure of burlesque, but a symbol of Ecstasy flinging down the gauntlet—Norman chain-mail, you know—to Common Life. Of course Common Life had the better of the duel; it always does. It isn't strange that people considered old Mr Grosmont a fool; but it is funny that they didn't see, with Mrs Meredith, how picturesque he was. "My dear," she said to me, "I admired his spirit intensely. But what a waste of good material! It reminded me of Sir Walter Raleigh's cloak." You see, in these days Common Life is a much tougher proposition than it was in the age of Cervantes, and Grosmont made the mistake of meeting the enemy on their selected site, and with their own weapons.

If only he'd been content to remain a picturesque symbol ! . . . If only he'd stuck to his broadsword !

'This was Grosmont's idea. I suppose he had between four and five hundred a year, and a wife who was quite a capable farmer behind him; enough, at any rate, to enjoy his dreams upon. He conceived the project—a sort of delayed echo of Abbotsford—of restoring Trecastel to its ancient glory. He was for making a fortune, for reviving the Barony of Grosmont, unhappily extinguished by Edward the Fourth. Metaphorically, he rode *cap-à-pie*, upon his charger, into the Stock Exchange, and six months later rode home, ruined.

'"At the best of times," said Mrs Meredith, "he was very excitable; but when he was engaged in this insane gamble he seemed, somehow, to sober down. He wouldn't speak to anybody; or perhaps he was so absorbed that he didn't notice them when he met them. It was most provoking to bow to him in the road and be cut. Lots of people took offence at it. I think he rode about on his big horse more than ever. He was a very lonely man. Several times the doctor met him standing, like an equestrian statue, in distant parts of the mountain. Once he came upon him, stock still above the edge of the Red Daren, looking down at Trecastel in a day-dream. You know, he can't have been *quite right*. He never breathed a word to any one —not even his poor wife—about the speculations; though her money was in it too. Then, one hot morning, he rode down to Felindre Post Office to call for letters. Prosser—the Prosser whose son is post-master now—came out with just one, and old Mr Grosmont opened it and read it. He must have looked

funny, or lost, or something, for Prosser stood gaping at him. And then without any sound, he pitched out of his saddle into the road. A stroke, my dear. All his right side was paralysed, but the fingers still clutched the letter. They carried him into the surgery here—the doctor was out at Tregoyd—and laid him all dusty on the sofa. An awful mess they made. And then I sat with him there. I didn't dare to leave him. . . . One of his eyes was closed, and he was snoring horribly. But the other was half open—just like a kestrel's when it blinks. He seemed to be taking you in, savagely, although he was unconscious."

'So Dr Meredith, it appears, drove the old man home—he can't have been as old as all that—and they rigged up a bed for him in the hall at Trecastel, among all his emblazoned shields. I suppose he lay there for three or four years. All the right side of him, and his speech as well, quite paralysed. Mrs Meredith says that he took a great dislike to his wife, an honest, plain-sailing sort of woman, who had really managed the family for a long time. "A happy release for the poor soul," said Mrs Meredith, "for I'm sure she must have found him very trying at the best of times, and now that he couldn't express himself, his temper was awful." No doubt he brooded over his failure. You can imagine how it would take a man of that kind with the pride of Lucifer.'

'Did he ever regain his speech?' asked Marsden. 'You see, I'm wondering if he managed to point the way of failure to Alaric, whom, by the way, Mrs Meredith doesn't seem to mention in those days.'

'You must be patient with her,' said I. 'No,

Grosmont never managed to speak again, although he could understand perfectly what other people said to him. One day, quite early in his illness, the doctor brought him up a box of pasteboard letters, of the kind people played with in the era of spelling-bees. It was Mrs Meredith's idea. At first he pushed them aside, as if they were an insult to his intelligence; then slowly he began to play with the alphabet. After innumerable bungles he got as far as two words—TRECASTEL and GROSMONT; then he threw it up.'

'Alaric was a loutish boy of sixteen at the time. Loutish is Mrs Meredith's word. I don't think she ever liked him; and of course he must have been an enormous contrast to his brother and his father. "He and his mother," said Mrs Meredith (you see, she brackets them), "were the type of people whom one feels instinctively sorry for, and leaves alone." Mrs Grosmont was far too busy making two ends meet to bother about anything. Her husband apparently hated the sight of her, being not in the least ashamed, mind you, and Alaric was—well, left alone. All through those strange, impressionable years, with that spectre of defeated ambition lying in the hall, and a degree of poverty of which they must all have been conscious —as of a tight shoe, Alaric was left alone. Mrs Meredith didn't tell me anything about him, simply because she couldn't. "A strange boy," she said, "and such a disappointing contrast to Charlie's sunny disposition. The doctor always had a conviction that there was more in him than appeared on the surface. But he was dull and slovenly—very slovenly—and he had no pride in himself. He had very beautiful eyes; and so.

for that matter, had his mother, a most unprepossessing woman in other respects; but I never thought him a nice boy. Really, I'm not surprised that old Mr Grosmont disliked the pair of them. One does prefer cheerful people in the sick-room."

'Old Grosmont really took a dislike to him. A very positive dislike. He was always restless when he came into the room. His great kestrel eyes would flash, he'd fidget with his shoulders and clasp his paralysed hand with the other in a queer, restless sort of way. Dr Meredith described it to me.'

'And didn't the gesture strike you as familiar?'

'Well, it didn't! I am horribly dense, How very peculiar! You shall give me your explanations later. And then, when they saw these signs of annoyance, Alaric and his mother would slink out, not together—I don't think they had anything in common but the eyes—leaving him to Charlie. He adored Charlie, principally, I think, because, unlike Mrs Meredith's kittens, he had bred true—hawk nose, falcon eyes, and all. A very handsome youth. Unfortunately, too, he had inherited his father's tastes for riding, and sport of every description, and that made him find the dim hall and the speechless wreck of a father an unnatural tie. Charlie was as wilful as he was handsome, and sometimes for days on end he would keep clear of his father's room. Dr Meredith actually found the old man crying once or twice when Charlie stayed away. Not so much because he wanted him, I fancy, as because his pride was hurt. I am as sorry as you are that I can't tell you more about Alaric. You know that he wasn't fond of the things that appealed

to Charlie, and even if he had been, it is doubtful if he would have shared them. Certainly he had not many books. The only books at Trecastel were old Mr Grosmont's library of heraldry and knightly history; and these, if you please, were ranged round his sickbed, though he never read them. I suppose they flattered his eye, like Dr Meredith's calf-bound *Archæological Transactions*. What would a Silurist do?'

Marsden hesitated. 'I don't expect he did anything,' he said. 'Do you remember that passage of Hazlitt in which he describes his adolescence? He says that for eight years he was "dumb, inarticulate, helpless, in words and deeds and looks, no better than a changeling." I imagine Alaric was like that; just mooning about soaking up atmosphere. And it is just because he was not deeply stirred by the things which move other people—I mean music and poetry and that sort of thing—that he arrived at the complete state of saturation, over and above all these things, in which I found him. He was soaking up inspissated gloom to a degree that would last him all his life, that and the wildest, most fragrant beauty. That was why he would be brought up with a jump in the middle of his meditations by those swift and lovely intuitions—the gorse bush tossing on the brow of a hill-side road, the birches standing up still in the gray of evening, and those dazzling castles of cumulus. He had the ideal education for the part in life (as far as I know it, which he was destined to play. You needn't be sorry in the least that there's no more. There's quite enough. As for Mrs Meredith or Dr Meredith or Charlie or

any one else knowing more of him . . . there is no more. Nobody but Alaric himself could ever guess at the secrets of those years. And even he could not solve them. Mrs Meredith found him dull. And dull he probably was—drugged with new loveliness and terror, like a drone drunk with honey. You needn't bother your head about Alaric's education any further. "In his chamber, weak and dying, was the Norman baron lying." Let's return to him, and to Charlie.'

'Even here,' I continued, 'you will find the ways diverging. For Charlie was not the kind of boy to be content with the vocation of a sick-nurse. He wouldn't have been like his father if he had been. Charlie grew more and more neglectful of his father. He became what Mrs Meredith calls "a little wild." I think she loved her Charlie none the less for that. It is one of the privileges of such handsome boys. A very becoming tenderness overspread Mrs Meredith's story when she came to Charlie's wild oats. I expect, you know, she was thinking of her own boy—the fellow who committed suicide up in Edinburgh. "I can't help thinking," she said, "that if his mother had been more sympathetic, Charles would have kept straight. He was such a charming boy . . . and Mrs Grosmont, somehow, so insensitive. She was not even intimate, you know, with Alaric, who was so like her . . . exactly the same eyes . . . more like a superior servant—a housekeeper, or something of that sort—than a mother." I should say it was an exceedingly fortunate thing for the Grosmonts that she was. And these extraordinary relations persisted up to the time of her death, some two years later. I imagine

that the good woman, fighting uphill all the time, had expended the very last of her energy. She was one of those intensely quiet women whom most people find unsympathetic. Mrs Meredith, who was really very charitable, respected her, but she didn't like her. I think of her as a homely barn-door hen harassed by her relations with the falcon breed of Grosmonts, her husband and Charlie; with Alaric . . . simply bewildered. Mrs Meredith persists that Alaric should have been fond of her—largely, I imagine, on the strength of his eyes. Charlie, she declares, was so much more human. She went to Mrs Grosmont's funeral ("patients," you know), and there was dear Charlie shedding the most natural tears, while Alaric stood there, wearing a gray tie—yes, a gray tie—looking as if the occasion and the sombre beauty of the burial service meant nothing to him. "I could have pinched him," said Mrs Meredith, "he looked so unconcerned, so sleepy."

'"*For man walketh in a vain shadow and disquieteth himself in vain: he heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them. . . . My heart was hot within me, and while I was thus musing the fire kindled, and at the last I spake with my tongue . . .*"' chanted Marsden. 'Good God, did the woman expect a Silurist to whine when he was face to face with the last and most terrible of mysteries?'

'Please don't confuse my point of view with Mrs Meredith's. But you may take hers to be the more usual. Mrs Grosmont was buried, and it was not very long before the old man followed her. I don't think he was fond of her, but you can make no doubt that

he missed her, for it is certain that she, and nobody else, had kept the place going. On this occasion, at any rate, the Merediths proved excellent friends. The doctor, who was nearly as competent a man of business as an archæologist, had been chosen by old Grosmont as his executor, with a princely legacy of fifty pounds "as remuneration for his duties and a small token of personal esteem." Quite in the baronial manner. "But, my dear,' said Mrs Meredith, "when George came to look into things, we found we simply couldn't accept the money. The doctor was even so foolish as not to send in his bill. There was nothing—practically nothing! A bare hundred pounds a year and that barn of a house, with its great silly tower. Oh, it nearly made me cry to think of that poor, poor woman, whom I had never really liked, slaving away her life to keep the house going, and Alaric at her funeral!"

'Old Meredith, it appears, had the two boys down in his study ("we invited them to tea, you know") one day about a week after the funeral, and explained matters to them. I suppose they were both surprised, though they already knew something of their father's wild gamble in search of the extinct barony. "I suppose it means," said Charlie, "that I shall have to set to and learn farming. It wouldn't do to sell Trecastel." (I doubt if they could have found a buyer.)

'"There isn't room for the two of us," said Alaric; "I shall have to go away. Charlie and I would never hit it off." "I'd try," said Charlie, with a generous burst. ("Such a nice-dispositioned boy," said Mrs Meredith.)

'"I'd rather not," said Alaric.

'So the doctor set to work to find something for Alaric to do.. He wrote to a patient who happened to be director of a joint-stock bank, to several insurance offices in London, and to the Grosmonts' family solicitor. It really seemed as if there was nothing that Alaric could do. "The doctor was really worried over it," said Mrs Meredith. "He's a man who *hates* writing letters; and all the people who replied wanted to know what Alaric could do. I shouldn't wonder if his extravagant name put them off. He went on writing letters to influential people for weeks and weeks. It seemed as if nobody would have him. And then, one day, poor Charlie rode down from Trecastel in a dreadful state—poor fellow, he was really very upset—to tell us that Alaric had gone."

'Gone: without the least warning he simply disappeared. Left no traces of any kind whatever. Not even a note to thank the Merediths for their letter-writing—not to mention the postage. I don't think the dear lady ever forgave him George's stiff fingers. "Alaric was always ungracious," she said.

IV

'CERTAINLY it was not very gracious. And yet, Mrs Meredith had been rather wilful in her misunderstanding of Alaric—simply, perhaps, because he was not like his father, or Charlie, whose sunny disposition so much appealed to her. Of course, he didn't say goodbye, because it would have involved explanations to unsympathetic people—Mrs Meredith for example, whose obligations towards the Grosmonts had begun just where her husband's ceased. And he was shy; you have no idea how shy he was. You see, he recognised that Mrs Meredith's concern for him was probably merely sentimental. Already he hated sentiment, principally because it didn't flatter his lonely egotism, and, what is more, he distrusted it profoundly. He behaved just like a colt in a field when the groom comes up to it with oats in one hand and a halter in another. He kicked up his heels and bolted. But fancy bolting to North Bromwich!'

'For the present you must fix your attention upon Charlie, for the stage is his. You must try to see what was in that round Norman head of his. . . . Not a great deal, I am afraid, not even his father's dreams. I don't mean that he had not engrained in him the Trecastel idea. That quick exclamation of his in Dr Meredith's study when he learnt of his father's losses, shows that the habit of thought came natural to him. "We must never sell Trecastel," sounded intense and

spirited, didn't it? If you have ever lived with a parrot, you may have heard one of these remarkable birds put a courageous face on a subject on the same way. On old Mr Grosmont's tongue the words would have stood for a flaming spiritual aspiration. With Charlie they were only a symbol of helplessness. He couldn't sell Trecastel, because he didn't know how to live without it. It was just a strong tower to shelter him from the necessity of fighting his own battles. I don't deny that he had courage of a kind; indeed, it would have taken another century to whittle down the Grosmont spirit to a physical cowardice, but of spiritual courage —the kind of courage which enabled Alaric to drift down from the eyrie (I take your figure) with the first joy of flight, he hadn't an atom. Above all things, he was anxious that his own pleasant way of life shouldn't be disturbed, and the Merediths saw to his comfort with infinite care.

'Mrs Meredith, to begin with, found him a housekeeper—a certain Mrs Maddy, sister of the doctor's fat groom, a rough sort of woman, whose husband had been cut to pieces in a mowing machine in the first year of their married life. She was childless, of a suitable age, and very quickly took to Master Charlie. I imagine she looked after him even better than the poor, worried Mrs Grosmont had done. You see, she had nothing else to do, and even if he had not been so remarkably handsome, the care of him must have helped to satisfy her frustrate maternity. A most tactful move on Mrs Meredith's part. The doctor, too, began by taking him seriously. He took it for granted that all the wild oats had been scattered, and as he rather

fancied himself, as a farmer, he used to ride over to Trecastel in the evenings, or call whenever he was passing, to give Charlie wholly unreliable advice on the subject of crops. "They were like boys together," said Mrs Meredith, and I suppose the old man *was* tasting a kind of vicarious youth; "it seemed as if Charlie were beginning to fill the gap which our loss, our great trouble (the Edinburgh boy) created. I was so glad for the doctor's sake."

'But this, of course, was far too good to last. The boy was not of the kind to lead a hermit's life, and poor old Meredith's legs were just a little too stiff to keep pace with him. In the market, in the hunting field, wherever men came together, Charlie was a favourite. He had inherited his father's seat in the saddle, he rode as straight as it was possible to ride in that abominable country, and Mrs Maddy, who, as I've already said, had nothing else to do, turned him out spick and span for the hunting field. Indeed, it was a shame that he wasn't better mounted. "It was terrible to see him looking so handsome on that ugly old thing of his father's, but, you see, the poor boy had to live on nothing," said Mrs Meredith. "It made me see how charming old Mr Grosmont must once have been in his young days, but Charlie was so much more approachable."

'That was the difficulty. Anybody could approach Charlie, and he quickly became intimate with so many undesirable people that he began to lose caste in a society which considers caste of infinitely more importance than character. He grew friendly with the kind of people who hunt for the sake of horse-dealing, and notably with a man named Shrives, a veterinary

surgeon in Aberdulas, a fellow with a stinking reputation—the sort of man that it would make one shudder to see half soaked beside Charlie's clean young body. It was no good for Dr Meredith to try and use his influence, for though the old man rode over to Trecastel more often than before, it was rarely that he found Charlie in. It worried him tremendously. "We were just like boys together," that was all he would say. You see, this was the second disappointment.

'"And the doctor is so charitable," flamed Mrs Meredith. "He isn't in the least bit a squeamish man. He would have done anything in the world to help Charlie Grosmont if he'd behaved in a manly way." I suppose she meant if he'd come and confessed his sins. Of course, he didn't do anything of the kind. He let things slide. He could ride straight enough, but he never played the game with the old man.

'"One night," said Mrs Meredith, "the doctor came back from Hereford looking quite old. I know that look of his so well: he only shows it when he has been really overdone . . . a long spell of night-work, or a difficult case; and then he is conscious of it, and tries to put me off with foolish jokes. . . . I know him! But this time he didn't joke at all. He just sat very quiet over the supper-table, and wouldn't eat anything. And then he told me that he had met Charlie, drunk, outside the Devereux Arms with that horrible vet. He had spoken to Charlie, not sanctimoniously, but as man to man, and the wretched Shrives had struck him with his riding-crop. Oh, it was horrible—a regular street fight, for what could poor George do? and Charlie lolling drunk against the wall hiccupping. I

told the doctor that now, at any rate, he could say that he'd done everything, but it was hard to console him. He knew how fatally obstinate the Grosmonts were."

'And so Charlie rode on his way. "There were *other things* besides drinking," said Mrs Meredith, in a whisper. Perhaps it was the pursuit of *other things* that brought him into contact with Tomas Gwyn. I will give him the picturesque name which the doctor communicated to me in Mrs Meredith's absence, because it is the one by which the country-side knew him: The Llanvihangel Ram. Perhaps I'm doing Tomas an injustice in associating him with Charlie's gallantries, for the title referred rather to the diversity than to the degree of his energies in this direction; but it is pretty certain that I couldn't do an injustice to his appearance, for he was a most vile-looking customer. His father's trade had been sheep-stealing, and his wages a hempen cord. Tomas called himself a potato factor, and devoted himself to the collecting of rags, bones, and bottles. He had come with a variegated collection of the latter when I saw him early one morning, outside the surgery door, a hamper full of them neatly strapped in his pony cart and watched over by a mangy yellow dog. A filthy old man, with a suave, insinuating manner which made one suspicious. "I want you to have a good look at him," said Mrs Meredith. And while I was having my good look, she recounted to me the drawing-room version of his career. She simply couldn't tell me how she disliked him—ugh! the very sight of him nauseated her. And the doctor only laughed. She implored me not to laugh at her.

'I'd no intention of laughing at her; but really there was a big element of humour in Tomas's conquests. I asked her, quite seriously, if that was the only thing she disliked him for.

'"No," she burst out. "And that was why I wanted you to look at him closely. Charlie Grosmont's father-in-law! He married the beast's daughter! My Charlie!"

'It did rather take my breath away. I pressed her to tell me more about it, but she only shook her head. She said that she must find some roses before the sun turned the corner of the stable roof. I believe the dear thing wanted to cry.

'"It is Constance's one weak spot," said the doctor, when I talked to him a little later. "Of course, Tomas Gwyn is an old ruffian. But Tomas has his points." (It was then that he told me the nickname.) "And as for the Grosmont affair, that is one of the matters that God disposes in spite of all that elderly matrons propose. Hah?"

'He was quite willing to talk about the affair. No doubt the break with Charlie after the scene in the street at Hereford, had affected him deeply at the time; but this was a much simpler disposition than Mrs Meredith's. He was generous by nature, and a doctor who has been in practice for over forty years can scarcely be narrow-minded in his estimates of humanity. He had outlived this disappointment, as I dare say he had outlived a dozen others, and at least one that was very big; and it was really a protest against the humiliation to which he had been put that smouldered in Mrs Meredith's mind. He had the simple kind of nature that is put at rest by a proverb. Obviously the

sort of person for whom proverbs were invented. "Boys will be boys," probably summed up the matter to his content. He explained the whole business without the least rancour. Tomas, it appeared, occupied a cottage upon the outskirts of the village which gave him his alternative name, at the bend of the Roman Road that loses itself upon the verge of the mountain. Cold Harbour, they call it. This cottage lay in the path of Charlie every time he rode from Trecastel to the plain; for there was no other way. And Tomas had certainly become acquainted with Grosmont at an early period in his dissipations, seeing that he moved, as a sort of camp-follower ready to pick up trifles, upon the fringe of the very shady company that Grosmont affected. Actually he played the jackal to Shrives' lion, for he had lived with the gipsies —probably had gipsy blood in his veins—and knew a thing or two about the doctoring of sound horses and the faking of the unsound. He also produced a strain of yellow mongrels, of the kind that I had seen in his cart, which were in great demand by the poachers of the neighbourhood, because they knew more about poaching in their puppyhood than the most expert poacher in his old age. Also, said Dr Meredith, it is quite possible that he had lent Charlie money—at point-to-point races, in public-houses, and at horse fairs.

'I think this is even probable, for I don't see how Charlie could possibly live at the rate of his friends on the rent of the Trecastel land, and the little bit of money that old Grosmont left. There's no doubt that he must have been a great help to the young man in the attempts at horse-dealing, with which he tried to

add to his income. At any rate, Charlie would have plenty of opportunity of meeting Tomas's legitimate offspring, Evan and Judith.'

'Judith?' said Marsden. 'I think I see where we are.'

'Yes, that was the daughter's name. "A fine girl, a very fine girl," says Dr Meredith. Mrs Meredith will supply us with details. "A very sickly baby," says she. "I always doubted if that miserable dispirited Mrs Gwyn would rear her. But you can never go by that, can you? You would hardly believe, to look at me now, that *I* was a delicate child. My dear, I can perfectly well remember when I was a little girl travelling down to the country in a sort of big omnibus (there were no railways in Mid-Wales then), and on the top of the omnibus my own special goat. Indeed, I was brought up on goat's milk. And—how the new young doctors would shudder!—three wine glasses a day of old port. I must have been just like my grandfather; for I declare I never went to bed sober. I used to sleep and sleep. And look at me now! Well, Judith Gwyn was just like that; only she, poor little thing, was half starved instead of being stuffed."

'Mrs Meredith's goat is not essential to my story, but it was essential to Mrs Meredith's way of telling it. I will try to separate the history of Judith's childhood from the conglomerate of malt extract, tooth-combs, and cod-liver oil in which the good lady embedded it. The delicate baby grew into a delicate girl. A poor little weasel of a thing with a thin chest, spindly legs, and a mop of foxy hair. "But even then," said Mrs Meredith, "her eyes were of a very lovely green. Like sunlight striking through green leaves." And

then, with an earliness and a suddenness that was almost southern, Judith shot up into a woman. "She nearly took my breath away! Oh! a beautiful girl, so slender and lovely, and buoyantly healthy as a sapling tree." Mrs Meredith insisted unconsciously on the tree figure throughout: those luminous green eyes, the sweet swaying motion; the foxy hair, which now becomes like beech leaves in autumn. And that is the impression the old lady gave me of the growing Judith. I can only think of her as a Dryad, with her woodland scent and freshness and freedom clinging around her. This is how Mrs Meredith put the seal of perfection on her: "She had no freckles." I am reminded of Alaric's vision of the silver birches standing up in the gray of evening."

'But it was Charlie who fell in love with her. It seems to me quite natural that he should have done so, for he was bound to fall in love with somebody, and to put his Grosmont enthusiasm into the business. It is a wonder to me, and I know it was a consolation to the doctor, that he didn't hit upon a Hereford barmaid, for his choice was extremely limited. He was hardly likely to fall beneath the charms of Mrs Maddy, and all the women of his own class, even the speedy young ladies of the hunting field, would turn up their noses at a friend of Shrives. Shrives had once been ducked in the Wye by a furious young farmer, and everybody knew the reason. Charlie did not want opportunities of seeing Judith. Mrs Meredith hints at a sort of persecution at home; for Mrs Gwyn was an ill-conditioned woman, and irritated by Judith's instinctive niceness and cleanliness. No girl could be

quite as lovely as Judith Gwyn without knowing it, and there is a sort of physical fastidiousness that goes with physical beauty. Judith was a rebel against dirt. Eventually she was persecuted, harried out of the home. It is the common fate of Dryads to be hunted to extinction. And so Judith, a frankly pagan figure, as I have suggested, ran wild about the mountain, or rather about the green foot-hills of the mountain, through the green lanes that cut the plantations of young larch, among the groves of ancient oak and the copses of mountain ash that shadow still pools. That was the setting in which Charlie found her. It was the only proper setting for her beauty, for she was really part of it—a personification, if you like, of the country's own shy loveliness and of its strangeness. . . .'

'Certainly she was nothing so fantastic as this to Charlie. I don't suppose Charlie knew what a Dryad was. She was just a beautiful passionate girl, with nothing mythological about her, kicking, in the name of cleanliness and fresh air, against the ways of her people at Cold Harbour, not particularly anxious to fall in love, but enormously excited by Charlie's love-making, and wondering if it pointed a way of escape. On second thoughts, I doubt if the last consideration troubled her. Charlie was the first person who had made her think she was worth talking to; she was beginning to expand. She must have felt like a nestling when it learns to fly. Of course, the couple were watched. Her brother, whose vocation was nocturnal and connected with the same yellow dogs, chanced upon them of a mild May evening in one of the wooded hollows below Trecastel, and when Judith came home deliciously

fluttered with haste and the memory of Charlie's kisses, he had a scene arranged for her. Evan and the mother were abusive; they gave her names that the child didn't even know the meaning of, and finished up by making her cry. You might as reasonably scold a kitten for its first love affair. And all the time Tomas Gwyn was sitting, very dirty, in the corner, chewing tobacco and sorting his rags. He didn't say a word on either side. He just let the other two rant away, while he went on with his business. But next morning, without consulting any one, he put on his best pair of breeches and an old coat of Dr Meredith's, and shambled up to Trecastel. Judith, to the pain and scandal of Mrs Maddy, had been there before him, and he found Charlie in a melting mood. His pretty Judith had been crying! Old Gwyn knew very well what he was about. He treated the whole matter on business terms, condoning (with his reputation!) the illicit romance. Every word he spoke was like the smirch of his dirty fingers on Judith's whiteness. Charlie was too furious to speak. . . . Tomas couldn't understand that at all. He had expected to settle the matter, man to man, as it were, on a financial basis; but now that Grosmont didn't seem to tumble to the idea of paying for the privilege of his daughter's acquaintance on friendly terms, he took up the attitude which this kind of animal assumes when its females are threatened: metaphorically, he put down his head and beat the earth with his hoofs. A very ugly ram he must have looked, too. He talked of compensation for the damage done—no more of future privileges. What was Charlie going to do?

'Charlie did it. He told Tomas Gywn to clear out, and when the old rascal turned ugly and began to argue, he pitched him out of the front door into a bed of dahlias.

'Three weeks later he married Judith at a registry office in Hereford. And this took the breath out of the mouth of Tomas, who had gone about the country calling Grosmont all sorts of names for the ravishing (presumed) of his daughter, and Evan, who had boasted in his cups that he would "do Charlie in." Tomas caved in because he was sharp enough to see that the relationship would be profitable: Evan, because he hadn't really cared two half-pence one way or the other. Only Mrs Gwyn refused obstinately to countenance her daughter. "She's made her bed, and she must lay on it," she said. Prophetically, maybe; but at any rate the new bed was cleaner.

'Charlie did the thing thoroughly. His bride had a marvellous new rigout in Hereford, and then they went to Weston-super-Mare for the honeymoon. It must have been all very strange; and yet the situation wasn't as incongruous as it seems at first; for, as I've told you, Judith was a girl of refined instincts; the language she talked is one of the most delicious of dialects, with liquid *l*'s, a deliciously pure "*i*" sound and a proper regard for the vanishing "*r*." She talked a good deal purer English than the average cockney girl of the middle classes; and you must remember, too, that it was the language on which Charlie himself had been brought up. Thinking of the high tower of Trecastel and the dusty heraldry in the hall, one is apt to get a false idea of Charlie Grosmont. Actually, you know,

he was just a handsome young farmer, nothing more.

'"She was really very sweet," said Mrs Meredith, "but when he came back from Weston we talked the matter over with Charlie (the dear fellow was *so* sensible), and suggested to him that Judith was not having a fair chance. She was only seventeen—not quite seventeen—you see. We pointed out how intelligent she was, and what a pity it would be for her and her children if she were not educated at all. We wondered if he would consent to her going away—just for a short time, if he could spare her for six months, say—to learn a little bit of the ways of polite society." Mrs Meredith had the whole plan cut and dried. She knew a certain Miss Carey, the sister of a clergyman in Cheltenham, who would be delighted to take Mrs Charles Grosmont as "paying guests" (she used the plural), and instruct the sweet thing at the same time, for a very modest weekly payment. In other words, she was to be pitched out of "papa and the potatoes" into the "prunes and prisms."

'Charlie was just a Grosmont. He'd done the thing in a magnificent fit of enthusiasm, and then he couldn't carry it through. Of course, he was in love with the girl; but then, old Gwyn had challenged his generosity. And now he behaved like a schoolboy. He wasn't much more. He consented to this preposterous scheme.

'We won't enter into the tender arguments that were used between them. They'd only been married six weeks. They were a couple of babies. Judith went submissively to Cheltenham. "We were both immensly taken with her," said Mrs Meredith,

"particularly the doctor; and we were anxious that she should be worthy of dear Charlie."

'It was really very good of our handsome young friend to let her go. If only it had been given to Judith to record her first experience of the proprieties and Cheltenham proprieties too? For you couldn't put a wild thing into a stuffier conservatory than one of those inland watering-places. Can you see Judith in Miss Carey's drawing-room at afternoon tea, an object of curiosity to Miss Carey's lady friends; or on the Parade or in Montpelier Gardens, riddled by the lecherous glances of retired colonels? Miss Carey suggests to me nothing but chintz and knick-knacks, charitable underclothing ("flannel articles," you know), and Anglican books of devotion. It must have been purgatory to Judith.'

'She wrote Charlie the most piteous letters; but Mrs Meredith had dinned into him an idea of *noblesse oblige*, the very first thing to appeal to a Grosmont. At last he went to visit the child in Cheltenham. Miss Carey, you may be sure, attended to the proprieties of the occasion; and Judith's pleadings were altogether too much for him. He brought her home. "It was a fortunate thing, really, that he did," said Mrs Meredith, "for he told me afterwards that Judy (as he called her) had actually made up her mind to run away from Cheltenham. She'd planned the whole thing. She was going to take a train to Hereford, and walk from there to Trecastel. I'm so glad she didn't. Only think of poor Miss Carey's feelings!"

'And then, as if this Cheltenham nightmare were not enough, Judith's troubles began. In the first place

she had Mrs Maddy against her. Was it likely that Mrs Maddy, who had looked after Charlie for several years, was going to make way for a chit of a girl of her own class and of less than half her age? At first, I expect, the lovers were too much wrapped up in each other to care about anything; but when the autumn came in, and Charlie had to get his horses fit for the cubbing season, Judith found herself left a good deal at home. She began to see—not that Mrs Maddy was dishonest, nothing of the kind—but that she was rather profuse in her housekeeping. At home Judith had been very nearly starved: I suppose the Gwyn's had lived principally on bread and bacon and their native potatoes; at Miss Carey's the tea had been kept in a locked canister, key on Miss Carey's chatelaine, and the butter regulated upon the half a pound per week per person principle. Mrs Meredith, too, you may be sure, had lectured her on the need for economy in a house as thin as Trecastel. She felt it her duty to speak to Mrs Maddy. Mrs Maddy felt it her privilege to retort. My God! what a catalogue of retorts. Judith came to Charlie with red eyes. Then followed a scene; a reconciliation; a new status of bristling neutrality. You can't help being sorry for little Judith; to her it must have seemed that she had exchanged the freedom of the magic foot-hills for a stone prison, Trecastel, looming up grim on the bare knees of the mountains.

'She had really married Charlie because she was alone and friendless, and because he had made such a jolly companion. Now the passion had a little faded out of the relationship, and he could not spend all his time making love to her. He was quite mediæval in

the way that he rode away to his hunting and his markets, leaving her in the proper situation of the lady of the castle, to do his mending and his cooking and await patiently his return. The hours she spent with Mrs Maddy in an atmosphere of innuendoes, waiting for Charlie to ride home!

'Once or twice he didn't ride home at all—they were market nights—and then Mrs Maddy scored heavily. "He didn't stay out at nights in the old days," she would say. Of course, that wasn't true, but it made poor Judith wonder if in some strange way she wasn't doing her duty by him. Charlie used to come home not at all repentant, simply sullen and dogged, with the eyes of a man who is hard ridden. Mrs Maddy would shake her head over him, but Judith, with her appealing childishness, would try to laugh him out of his heavy mood. And then, perhaps, Charlie would suddenly laugh too, and kiss her passionately. All his love in those days was like that—curiously passionate. He would kiss her as a man gulps whisky to kill care. It frightened her, and yet reassured. In the intervals she wondered if she were losing him.

'For the present, I have to give you in a short space the history of at least five years at Trecastel. For Mrs Maddy was not Judith's only trouble. Indeed, at times, Mrs Maddy was a consolation. I think that little by little Judith found her way into the only corner of Mrs Maddy's maternal heart that Charlie left unoccupied, for it was hard to resist anything so fresh and beautiful; and so her relations with the housekeeper resolved themselves into an unending series

of estrangements—bitter estrangements—and reconciliations, in which Judith's head reposed on Mrs Maddy's ample bosom and was stroked by Mrs Maddy's fat hand. Judith's hair was an immense fascination to Mrs Maddy; whenever Judith washed it, she would ask for the privilege of brushing it. Judith would sit out in the sun of the gray courtyard, and Mrs Maddy would let the lovely stuff, that was neither gold nor copper, slip through her fingers, and swish the comb through it until she grew drowsy or hypnotised. And when she had finished she would kiss the nape of Judith's neck. . . . Oh, yes, she must really have been fond of the child. Her early hostility now became concentrated on the other Gwyns, Tomas and Evan, who began, by degrees, to haunt the neighbourhood of Trecastel, particularly when Charlie was away. Judith had always hated Evan for his idleness and his native coarseness; now she began to fear him, for he had determined to profit as much as he could by his sister's marriage. He became aggressively friendly. Judith infinitely preferred his former bearishness, though she had really hoped to be rid of him altogether. Whenever she wandered far from Trecastel—and you may be sure she had not said good-bye for ever to her old haunts—Evan would be on her track. He would scoff at her fine clothes, though I am satisfied that these were very modest, and speak cruelly of Charlie; and then he would suddenly change his tone and try to fondle her with hands that smelt of ferrets, calling her "his little Judy." Then he began to pester her for money; and once, just to get rid of him, she gave him half a crown. Then he himself became like a

ferret that has tasted rabbits' blood. He dogged her incessantly, and always his cry was for money.

'Unfortunately, the estimable Miss Carey had taught her no rule of conduct for these emergencies. She was frightened to tell Charlie: principally, I imagine, because she wanted to shut all that part of her life right away from him, and partly also because Charlie was becoming less and less accessible. He was so easily irritated. One day he had come in storming at what he called the persistent aggravation of old Tomas, who had been sticking to him like a horse-leech. "I married you, not your father, Judy," he declared. "God only knows why I did it, but there it is!"

'"I thought you loved me," said Judith.

'"Well, I suppose I do," sighed Charlie. He kissed her dutifully. Couldn't she tell them to keep away?

'Couldn't she tell them to keep away! She would have given anything in the world for Trecastel to have been lifted clean over the mountain out of the reach of them. They ferreted round, those Gwyns, until they could find a weak spot in the walls. They cajoled her: they threatened. First it was money they wanted, and then it was even food. She gave to them because she didn't dare to refuse, because she didn't dare to risk a quarrel with Charlie, who was growing so strangely irritable, so easily put out, so . . . so scornful, even, at times. That "God knows why I married you" had come as an awful shock to her; with him it had been the announcement of a conviction steadily growing with his general discontent of things. Those few words seemed to alter their whole relation far more definitely than any of his acts, and not a

million kisses could atone for them. She began to wonder; for if she were losing Charlie, the Gwyns would make her position more than ever intolerable, since she would be left without even the help of her pride.

'Charlie, you see, was going steadily downhill. He renewed his friendship with Shrives; he lost money at local race-meetings, where every horse ran crooked; he had atrocious luck with his own colts. A three-year-old with which he expected to make a good price went lame a week before May fair at Aberdulas. He suspected Tomas Gwyn of having tampered with it; threw the accusation in Gwyn's face at the weekly market. There was a scene ending in blows and a police court case. The local papers had it "Unfortunate family quarrel." "Old Mr Grosmont" was happily dead, but all the country-side, including the Merediths, were shocked. "If only Judith had been the kind of girl who could have used her influence for good with him," Mrs Meredith complained. As if any one had ever influenced a Grosmont! "A girl of his own station might have helped him to rise above misfortune." . . . A girl of his own station would probably have left him! "My husband did all he could; indeed he bore with him wonderfully."

'The fact of the matter was that, with his failing fortunes, Charlie became obsessed by an idea. The recognition of any idea, of anything unconnected with his instincts, was so unusual a thing with him that it loomed out of all proportion in his consciousness. I suppose the spectre was raised originally from the depths of depression into which his money losses had thrown him and the actual loneliness of his existence.

He conceived a vast distrust and hatred of Trecastel. The house itself, that had been the centre of all his father's hopes, became to him a monument of despair. The idea consumed him so that he must be always talking of it. To Judith, at night, he would grumble: "If only we could get away from this place, Judy! Where could we go—Where could we go?"

'And she would smile at him. "We were very happy here, Charlie, weren't we?"

'In the morning he would rise early and set off riding. He rode at a terrific pace, stooping forward in the saddle, looking neither to left nor right, with the eyes of a man who is hard pressed. He rode so fast that he would startle people in the lanes, and as often as not he would not recognise his friends. He was getting fearfully thin, and rapidly losing his good looks. Mrs Meredith, who met him one day by the shoeing forge, was distressed to see him. "My dear boy, you must see the doctor," she said. He only laughed, but she sent out her husband to him.

'"Money, Charlie . . . Hah?" he asked, and he put his hand on his shoulder. No, it wasn't only money. Charlie was not a good hand at expressing himself, but he got it out somehow. It was Trecastel. He hated the place so. The Grosmonts had been there so many years, and had dwindled away from a powerful family to—to this. He dared not think of all those years. It made one giddy, like looking over the edge of a precipice. It made one want to throw oneself over too. (Charlie's figures were getting rather mixed.) He couldn't help thinking of his father's miserable end, of the utter loneliness of his life. He couldn't

help thinking that the family was as helpless as that high tower, mouldering away upon the edge of the mountain, a mockery of its former greatness, a ghost of strength that had departed. He felt as though he had never had a fair chance, as though he had started life with an aged enfeebled strain of blood. And Trecastel reminded him . . .

'Old Meredith clapped him on the shoulder. Let him wait till he had a family of kicking brats with new and vigorous blood in them. Wasn't his future wrapped up in Judith?

'Judith? Ah, poor Judy (he spoke sentimentally) didn't understand him. He supposed it was his fault. He had done her a great wrong by marrying her.

'"You mustn't expect your wife to understand you. Good Lord, man, be reasonable," cried the doctor.

'He gave Charlie any amount of sturdy advice and a bottle of medicine wrapped up with meticulous care in white paper and sealed with blue wax. He was very proud of his skill in wrapping up medicine bottles.

'"What is the matter with Charlie?" demanded Mrs Meredith very imprudently.

'"The family complaint in a new variety: Egotitis —Hah?" said the doctor, enormously proud of his miserable joke.

'Actually Charlie was leading the very worst kind of life for this disorder. He was spending a good deal of his time in public-houses with Shrives, riding fiercely in quest of excitement of all kinds, stumbling back, dead tired, to Trecastel in the small hours, when Judith or the faithful Mrs Maddy would be waiting up for him. When once he had reached home,

the bluster and the swagger and the high spirits which had ridden his day would fall from him, and he would drop down like a tired horse. Judith's tenderness was quite fatal to his self-control; if she caressed him and petted him as she wanted to, he became instantly querulous. At other times his manner would be high-pitched and excited, and then she would be almost afraid of his passion, for his kisses smelt of whisky. As a very little girl she had hidden with Evan in the cupboard under the stairs when Tomas Gwyn was smashing furniture and her mother crying somewhere out in the night.

'"You should humour him, you silly," said Mrs Maddy, the mouthpiece of working-class philosophy.

'But Judith shuddered. She was horribly afraid.

'I think Dr Meredith had been instinctively arguing on the right lines when he suggested to Charlie that his hopes for the future were wrapped up in Judith and the probability of her bearing him children with a little more vigour than was native in his own blood. There was, of course, a lurking possibility that they might inherit the qualities of their grandfather, Tomas Gwyn; but Tomas, at any rate, was not lacking in vigour. I suppose they had been married between three and four years when Dr Meredith told him that this hope was likely to be realised; and the announcement brought Charlie up sharply. "There was really no vice in the boy," said Mrs Meredith fondly, "and when he knew that the baby was coming, he pulled himself together in a way that surprised us." I think those months must also have been the happiest that Judith had passed at Trecastel, for nobody could be

more delightfully attentive than Charlie when he wanted to. Mrs Maddy, too, rallied to her in this emergency, that always arouses the clannishness of women. Mrs Meredith was a constant visitor. Everybody made a fuss of Judith, and though she rather resented the loss of freedom, she was protected at any rate from the attentions of the Gwyns. Charlie's care of her was just a little embarrassing. She loved it, and yet she couldn't get the idea quite out of her mind that he was concerned for the baby more than for her. She was even a little jealous; and the relation between them was not without awkwardness, for Charlie was hardly cut out for the rôle of a penitent prodigal.

'"I don't think she was really fair to him," said Mrs Meredith. "Don't you think it stiff and unnatural that she should have held back from him? Now that they had this hope in common, she might have let bygones be bygones." I am certain that she did; but Judith was not without pride, and not quite as childish as she had been.

'It was a summer of marvellously fair weather, such a summer that Mrs Meredith and the doctor both remembered it. The month of May had been as full of sweet rain as it often is on the mountain, and June unfolded like a great, sweet-smelling flower beneath a blazing sky. Every day Judith would walk slowly across the flagged courtyard and through the garden down the alleys of spicy pinks to the little wooden gate that gave out on to the orchard. Mrs Maddy would follow her carrying a deck chair, cushions and rugs. And there she would sit all day in the dappled shade of the orchard while the breezes, sweet with the scent

of hay gathered from mountain meadows, would rustle the branches above her head, where the cherries swelled to bursting. All through the day she would sit there in an idle dream, gazing out over the fields that were flooded with light and perfume until the sky grew paler, and the lazily sailing clouds came to anchor on the horizon, till the whir of distant mowing machines died away on the hills and the whir of the corn-crake awoke an echo. Then Charlie would come home with a face tanned by haymaking, and he would take her arm, and they would walk slowly back to the house, through a dusk of sweetbrier in which the wings of pale moths fluttered. All through the haymaking season this wonderful weather lasted, but every day the heat became more oppressive. One evening the clouds, which had been marshalled to westward, converged above the higher summits of the mountain. They gathered silently behind Trecastel, and then they rose up black above the ridge, shadowing all the sky. The flat ridges above the Red Daren stood up in horrible blackness against the blackness of the cloud. "There's a storm coming," said Judith. "I will go ahead, and you fetch the chairs in, Mrs Maddy, there's a dear." A great splash of rain fell on her hand. "Hurry up," she cried, and went away walking swiftly to the house. The storm had gathered so quickly as to deceive them. The first flash of lightning struck a little spinney of pine, a stone's-throw from the tower. A wonder that it didn't strike the tower itself ! Judith was frightened. She slipped and fell. Already Mrs Maddy was by her side. She dropped her chairs and cushions, and helped Judith into the house.

'Three hours later Charlie galloped through the rain into Felindre to fetch Dr Meredith. It was three months before her time, you know, and the baby was born dead. "I've never seen a man take anything more hardly," said the doctor. '"My God," he said. "It's the end. It's the end." . . . I left him alone. It was the only thing to do."'

V

'To tell you the truth, I find the Rake's progress of Charlie rather depressing. Mrs Meredith's partiality for him irritates me, as much as her misapprehension of Judith. He went bowling downhill in the company of Shrives, with Tomas Gwyn hanging on to just as much of him as he could catch, and left my beautiful Judith (you see I already feel a proprietary interest) not altogether unhappily, to lament her disappointment.'

'I don't know how far that disappointment went. I think she had looked forward to having her baby as something to play with, something to temper her loneliness; but, as I've told you, she was even a little jealous of the improvement in Charlie's behaviour, and when she heard him on the stairs crying out to Dr Meredith that "this was the end of it," and that sort of thing, she simply set her little teeth. "H'm, where do I come in?" she asked Mrs Maddy.

'"You naughty girl! Lie still, and stop talking," Mrs Maddy replied.

'Judith (a most vivacious invalid, I assure you) would do nothing of the sort. She was piqued. She was going to bring Charlie round to his bearings. There was to be a period of exasperating coldness that would reclaim him to her feet. It was not the first time she had tried the "*Amantium iræ*" recipe; but on this occasion it failed her. Charlie, summoned to her bedside, was only profoundly depressed. She

applied the stimulus, Mrs Maddy bristling at her cruelty—but he wouldn't respond. "This is the end of all things. The house of Trecastel is tottering into decay. The place isn't fit to live in. It will soon be uninhabitable by any one except bailiffs. The thunder rain has ruined the hay crop. Here is my last chance of recovery gone to pot. For God's sake, let me get out of this bedroom and have a drink." His face said all this, and a lot more. "The poor fellow was that miserable!" said Mrs Maddy to her brother the fat coachman, "and the little 'ussy wouldn't look at him. She makes me wicked." "I don't think he was quite so wild,' said Mrs Meredith, who was kept in touch with Trecastel by way of Mrs Maddy and her brother. "I mean, he didn't do such extravagant things; he was less excitable, older somehow; but I'm afraid the poor boy was drinking heavily. He was silent, brooding deeply over the spite which fate had against him, moderately attentive to his own business, fighting the matter out in a corner with no companion but a bottle. In a way his independence freed Judith of responsibility. She did not worry about him nearly so much as she had done; indeed, she had quite enough to do to keep pace with the pesterings of the Gwyns. It became a common gossip of the village that Tomas and Evan were stripping the bare Trecastel barer, and people were amused to think how Charlie was paying for his rashness. I don't suppose their gossip ever came to his ears, for he was secretive and depressed, and spoke to very few. Mrs Maddy (*via* the coachman) delivered an admirable judgment: "Those Gwyns . . . Locuses! That's what they are."

'For twelve months or more the Merediths saw nothing of Charlie. All news of Trecastel filtered down to the village through the picturesque imagination of Mrs Maddy, and twelve months is not a great time in such a leisurely country as that, where a year may pass without anything of great importance happening. And then Charlie rode down one morning with the amazing news that Alaric was coming home. Everybody had almost forgotten that Alaric existed. The Merediths were quite excited. 'What can I do?' Charlie complained. "I suppose I shall have to take him in. Isn't that just like Alaric now?—to stay away all these years without a friendly word or sign of his being alive, and then to come and plant himself on me, just as if I weren't overburdened already. I can't keep Alaric. How can I keep Alaric, when the house is no better than a ruin, and the Gwyns are nosing around it like hungry dogs? I shall end by shooting Evan Gwyn—I've told you that I shall. My God! as if I hadn't enough to put up with now without Alaric." Old Meredith told him that it wasn't quite as bad as all that. Alaric hadn't been much of a burden on the Grosmont estate since his father's death. Apart from a little lapse in manners (those neglected adieus!) he reckoned that Alaric had behaved remarkably well. He had as much right to Trecastel as Charlie, who couldn't go against the spirit of his father's will—could he now?

'"It will lead to endless complications," grumbled Charlie, "endless complications. Alaric isn't one of us. He never has been. It will be just the same as ever. Alaric will be odd man out. I have Judith to consider."

'At this time of day! They couldn't help smiling

at him. They asked him how long Alaric was likely to stay. "The fellow was as indefinite as ever," said Charlie. Nothing but the bare announcement that he expected to be arriving somewhere about the sixteenth of May (it was then the twelfth); that he was sending forward some books, several boxes, and a piano, and that he remained Charlie's affectionate brother. "Affectionate be damned!" said Charlie. "After all these years, you know; it isn't fair." He rode away grumbling: "A piano—My God!"'

'I wish,' said Marsden, 'that I had anything in my diary to correlate my last encounter with Alaric in North Bromwich and this retreat to Trecastel. I told you, I think, that he seemed really depressed. He had failed in so many directions. I may have spoken to him on the very brink of this plunge. He may even have been going to the station.'

'On that score, at any rate, I can correct you. He didn't go by train at all. He walked—all the way from North Bromwich.'

'But how like Alaric!' Marsden exclaimed. 'It must have been a marvellous pilgrimage to him. In all those years I doubt if he had ever put his nose outside the centre of North Bromwich, where everything is colourless, steeped in smoke and overpowdered with soot. And then, to set off westward and to the south in May!—to have his heart brought into his mouth by the peerless reality of his visions—that gorse bush tossing on the hill-side road, those birches standing up in the gray of evening, that dazzling castle of heaped cumulus! And he was a very different being, remember, from the queer, inarticulate youth

who had turned his back on beauty so many years before. It must all have been as unreal to him as a dream, so unimaginably fresh and lovely. Do you remember the ecstasy of his venerable predecessor Traherne? I will show you how the world appeared on that journey to Alaric Grosmont.'

Marsden leaned over in his chair, and pulled a book from the nearest shelf. He read aloud, softly, as though he were afraid to bruise the beauty of the words :—

'"The green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me; their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things. . . . The corn was orient and immortal wheat which never should be reaped nor was ever sown."—I beg your pardon—I had forgotten it was May. But how is this? *"The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the world was mine; and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it. . . ."*'

'I wonder if there was any fear in his ecstasy? I doubt it; for he was a prisoner released. His way led him through the heart of Middle England : "like a psalm of green days telling with a quiet beat." And then, in some magical evening (perhaps the nightingales were still on Malvern), he may have seen the line of the mountain brooding low in the west as it had brooded over his North Bromwich dreams. Then, perhaps, he felt some shudder of the ancient sorcery. From the ridge of Malvern he may have seen the whole march

steeped in the sunset—just as the Marchers steeped it in blood in the days when the Grosmonts were men. I wonder if any dreams of this kind were in Alaric's rejected novel. On the sixteenth, then, he came to Trecastel.'

'Yes, he came by the Roman Road, past Cold Harbour, and up the green lane to the foot of the orchard. Charlie was away—intentionally, I expect; he had made the excuse that he must ride over to Aberdulas on business, but the women had been waiting for him all day. They had worked up a series of thrills about the time of the arrival of every train at Llanvihangel (there were only four in the day) and each time they had been disappointed. They stood together talking in the courtyard while one of the farm-hands was bringing in the evening milk.

'"He can't come to-night, Mrs Maddy,' said Judith —"how tiresome."

'"Better he never came at all," said Mrs Maddy. "The master doesn't want him, that's pretty plain. There's no peace with brothers." They heard the orchard gate swing. "That's him coming, I expect."

'"You silly. . . . It's one of those tramps, or a labourer out of work. I can see. . . . It's quite an elderly man, middle-aged at any rate, in a long black cloak. Go and speak to him, and ask him what he wants. I hate those people. Where is Harry gone to with the milk pails?"

'Alaric swung dreamily into the courtyard. He saw them, with a start, and raised his hat. "Is Mr Charles at home?" he asked.

'Judith felt like crying. This couldn't be Alaric,

she thought. You see, she had already painted for herself quite an excited little picture of what Alaric was like; she had imagined him younger and more sprightly than Charlie—gallant, with a sort of town polish. He was only a year younger than Charlie, and yet she had always thought of him as more of her own age, a possible companion, a comfort, even, in her loneliness. And here she found herself face to face with the physical negation of all those pretty ideals : the figure to which you had said good-bye in North Bromwich a few days before; our pursy, paunchy, moon-faced friend. Yes, he arrived at Trecastel in his dusty frockcoat and button boots. Mrs Maddy confided her impressions to her brother. "I couldn't have believed it was 'im. I couldn't really. He looked like a scissor grinder." Perhaps that will enlighten you. . . . Judith said : "Are you Alaric?" I'm sure the inflection expressed her surprise. He said : "Yes. And you are Charlie's wife?" "I am Judith," she said.

'They showed him in, and made him comfortable. How he must have hated it!'

'Indeed, he would have done,' said Marsden. 'I remember him telling me that the first stipulation he ever made in engaging rooms was that he shouldn't be pestered with attentions. And poor little Judith, trying to be polite, must have got on his nerves for other reasons. He was like some lonely bird returning to a desecrated nest. He didn't know either of these women, and behind their well-intentioned kindness he must have been conscious of all the past—a thousand things, haunting presences so many times more real to him than their real voices.'

'You have guessed correctly. He didn't always answer their questions, for the past, I suppose, would sweep like a sudden veil between him and their presence so that their voices were like the voices you hear in a dream. Judith, after the first shock of his appearance, had plucked up all her courage to be nice to him, for Charlie's sake, and now he didn't even listen to her. "He doesn't like me.' That was what her suspicious little mind jumped to. "Perhaps he's jealous of us, me and Charlie; perhaps he's disappointed, or thinks I'm not good enough."

'"I'm so sorry," said Alaric, quite sweetly. "I missed what you said . . ." But Judith was frightened, and he couldn't tempt her back. She looked at him wonderingly out of her green eyes. He turned away. He wasn't used to women. When tea was over, they left him alone in the hall. "Of course, 'e *may* 'ave been tired," said Mrs Maddy, "or 'e *may* 'ave been drinking, or it *may* 'ave been just his queerness. But my opinion is that 'e's a surly brute." Such was the fat coachman's report, and Mrs Meredith's mind no doubt echoed "Alaric is so ungracious."

'It was very late when Charlie came home. The women had gone to bed long before, telling Alaric that his bed was made in the tower-top—''your old room," said Judith, who had planned a pretty surprise —and leaving him drowsing in the hall, by candle-light among his ghosts. I wonder how it all appeared to Alaric with his newly matured philosophy, that bare familiar room in which he had seen the old man dying, through which he had passed daily in the

helpless musings of his boyhood. . . . Very little had changed. The dusty coats of arms were still hanging on the walls. The candles burned in the same Sheffield-plated candlesticks, their flames mirrored in the same lucent oak. And outside the night was black and mysterious as ever, blacker for the consciousness of imminent mountain ridges and utterly silent but for the cry and answer of the owls—the constant murmur, so constant that it became taken up into silence, of mountain water trickling to the rivers.

'Charlie, as I've told you, came in late. I expect he would rather have stayed away altogether, and Alaric wouldn't have been sorry. Nothing could be more objectionable to a Grosmont of any description than an encounter of this kind. I wish Mrs Maddy had been at the keyhole to tell us how they met; for the situation is big with drama.'

'You shall be independent of her,' said Marsden, 'for the scene is easily reconstructed, and the important part of the dialogue not what the brothers said, but what they left unsaid. I will present it on the most approved lines, even to the stage directions. Listen :

[*In the passage outside, a lurching step is heard. Alaric, who has been sitting at the fireside, blinks, and fumbles instinctively in his watch-pocket. Charlie Grosmont enters the room, a little dazzled even by the mild light of the two candles. An elderly young man, thin-faced—with a network of purplish veins over his high cheek bones. His eyes have a strained look, as though he were still*

riding hard into the dark. His shoulders are dusty, and the foam from his horse's mouth has spattered his breeches. He throws his gloves and his crop into the other chair, and stands by the table. He speaks rather thickly.]

CHARLIE. Hallo! You've come, then?

ALARIC. Yes. I walked. You've ridden back from Aberdulas?

CHARLIE. Yes. It's damned dusty. (*He smacks his coat and looks suspiciously at Alaric's boots.*) What have you done with the women?

ALARIC. They've gone to bed.

CHARLIE. Judith gave you some food?

ALARIC. Oh yes.

CHARLIE (*who has expected some comment on his wife's appearance, glancing at the buffet, tired and irritable*). Don't appear to have left me any. (*He comes to the buffet, opens the cupboard, tosses an empty whisky bottle into the waste-paper basket and uncorks another.*) Have a drink?

ALARIC. No, thanks.

CHARLIE (*laughing*). Teetotaler? You look like a bloody dissenting parson in that coat. You're fat, Alaric. You're in very poor condition. . . . You want exercise.

ALARIC (*taking off his boots and yawning*). I'm sleepy. . . . I must have caught off just before you came in. (*He fumbles again at his watch-pocket. Then rises, takes one of the Sheffield candlesticks from the table, and crosses to the door in his socks.*) Good-night.

CHARLIE (*smiling contemptuously*). Good-night. (*As an after-thought*) Good-night, old fellow.

[Alaric goes out, and after a moment Charlie lurches down into the chair he has vacated. He stares for a moment at the glass of neat whisky which he holds in his hand, as if wondering how it got there. At last he swills it round his mouth and swallows, smacking his lips.]

Ah. . . . *A moment later he picks up one of Alaric's buttoned boots and examines it intently, then he laughs outright.)* My God! . . . (*He reaches out to the table for the bottle, and the curtain descends.*)'

'Perhaps you are right—You think it was all as simple as that? You must not forget that Charlie had spoken quite querulously to the Merediths about Alaric's return, and I expect that he had also discussed it with Judith. He comes in, primed with whisky—"market peart" as they call it in those parts, and then—says nothing.'

'Yes,' said Marsden. 'He was too surprised to say much. The Alaric against whose return he had been fuming, was the thin, big-eyed youth whom he had known "dumb, inarticulate, helpless"; he had never dreamed of anything so solid as the Alaric he found. I expect that the little thin patch on the crown of his head, the dusty frock-coat, the broad middle-aged face took his breath away. I introduced the button-boots in all seriousness; for I regard them as significant. A man who has the courage to wear them takes some tackling. But perhaps you have details of a stand-up fight?'

'No. I believe the invasion was accomplished peacefully. A few days later (you know what goods trains

are) the boxes of books and the piano arrived. I have told you that they had given Alaric his old room; the topmost chamber of the tower, which can only be approached in two ways—by the narrow spiral staircase, which opens out of the barn or fowl roost at the bottom, or through a passage equally narrow which connects the topmost gyration of the stairway with the adjoining wing of the house. To carry up the books and music was a simple matter, but the piano was left for two days standing in the courtyard, covered by a rick tarpaulin.

'"Suppose you leave it there?" said Charlie maliciously.

'Dr Meredith, who had called in to welcome Alaric, sent up his man and the carpenter from Felindre; and the fat coachman, who was used to stuffing lofts with trusses of hay devised an elevated pulley by which the piano was lifted to the window of Alaric's room and hauled inside. "And not so much as a shilling!" said Mrs Maddy's brother. I don't suppose Alaric had a halfpenny in the world. Judith gave them cider and girdle cakes in the courtyard. They left the cakes. "Mr Charles is a proper gentleman," was their verdict in the village. "Mr Charles is very free with his money."

'In every direction it seemed as though Alaric was making a most unpromising start. Mrs Maddy, to begin with, by far the most powerful agent of publicity, had taken offence at his "high ways" with Judith on their first meeting. "Relations," said Mrs Maddy, "is relations, whether by accident (marriage presumably) or by blood. And her so pretty and sweet!

He should have kissed her, by rights. Why, he'll scarcely trouble to speak to his own brother. Times, Mr Charlie will say something, in the joking way he has, and the fellow will just turn about and stare at him. It's unnatural."

'Of course, Mrs Maddy could not be happy unless she were taking sides; already she had arranged the established household on one side and the invader on the other. Besides, she was bound to say the same thing over and over again; so that even Judith, who was with her for the greater part of the day, must have been influenced by her partisan view. Mrs Meredith has a long story to tell. "I had really quite taken to Judith since she lost her baby," she said. "The girl seemed to have softened so much." That was only Mrs Meredith's way of putting it; for Judith was never hard. I fancy the softening was a subjective phenomenon in Mrs Meredith. When Alaric had been living at Trecastel a month or more, Judith came down to Felindre to pay one of the usual aimless calls, and they had a talk over the tea-table, Mrs Meredith, you may be sure, fishing for all she was worth. Judith couldn't say if she really liked Alaric, although she supposed it was her duty to do so. She found him difficult to understand. She wanted to do so many things for him—little things which a woman couldn't bear to see left undone, and yet she was afraid to ask him. He was so different from Charlie; but his eyes were so nice that he must really be nice himself, even though he seemed so stand-offish. And, after all, she hadn't seen very much of him.

'Mrs Meredith wanted to know why. "I wanted to

see exactly how things stood," she protested, "so that I might help her in some way. I could see the poor child was uncomfortable, and I knew already how ungracious Alaric was." Well, it appeared that Alaric spent most of his time up in his tower-top. In one corner he had placed the piano, with a great pile of music, stuck in an oak Bible box which he had found in the barn. He had taken an enormous time arranging his books; so long that Judith felt that he was probably needing help—"women are always having to put the things straight"—and so she had found the key of the passage leading from the house to the staircase, and knocked at his door. No answer. She had wondered suddenly what the room was like, and pushed the door ajar. And there was Alaric, leaning up against the edge of the table, staring straight in front of him, with his eyes wide open looking at nothing. She said "Oh!" She couldn't help it, and when he turned to look at her she felt just like a little girl who has burst out laughing in church, he was so solemn. Perhaps, he was meditating on Self-Control. She had to laugh, and he looked more solemn still. She felt awful—oh—awful!'

'She told him exactly why she had come. Wouldn't he let her help him to tidy things? He wasn't exactly as ungracious as you might have expected; but the way in which he refused her was—well, just like being led to the door with a strong hand on your shoulder. The dust was simply awful. She couldn't help dusting the top of the piano while they were speaking, and it was this movement, a mixture probably of instinct and nervousness, that made him smile at last. She

was standing by the piano, in a pink overall, and the sun was striking through the little diamond panes of glass in the window. He said suddenly: "Don't move . . . Do you know that your eyes are green?" Of course she knew! What girl of her age wouldn't have known? But it made her blush. "It was silly of me to blush," she told Mrs Meredith, "but he says such funny things . . . You know, I do really like him," she went on. "I like him dreadfully in spite of his being so different from Charlie. But I always feel that he looks at me as if I were some strange animal. He's frightened when I speak, and amazed when I want to do things, and startled when he discovers that I've got green eyes. He didn't say it was nice to have green eyes, as Charlie would, or nasty, as Evan always used to."

'This discovery of Alaric's apparently put an end to the interview. I don't know what he was doing in the tower all day. He didn't play the piano: Judith was always listening for it. I don't think he can have read much, for he had only a very few books. Mrs Meredith was quite satisfied to say that he moped—whatever that may mean. "Why doesn't he take regular exercise?" she asked Judith. "He will get terribly fat if he never goes out." Of course, Judith couldn't explain this or anything else to her.

'I expect it was this way: the man must have found it difficult to break a habit of ten years' standing. I'm sure he would have thought it unnatural to be out of doors in office hours; he would have felt that something was radically amiss with the whole clockwork of his life; and you must remember also that

the very mechanical regularity of his occupation at Wilburn's, the automatic casting of figures and transcribing of legal formulæ, had been to him a refuge; they had given him a sense (unreliable, if you like) of security during certain hours from the fancies to which he was a prey in his period of idleness. Of course, it was all very silly. I know that; but, as I've told you, the man was unreasonably afraid of himself, and now he must have been tortured as incessantly in his high solitude as any hermit in the Thebaid. I am astonished that he noticed the colour of Judith's eyes at all. The sunshine, striking in through those little diamond panes, must have played an unkind trick on him. As you see, he quickly recovered himself. Of course, he didn't see very much of Mrs Maddy or Judith; for what could he have found in common with either of them? I am sure he wished that he could have taken his meals in the tower too.'

'The thing which upset our Judith was not that he avoided her—she was sensible enough to put that down to his idiosyncrasy—but that he wouldn't let her do things for him. There were a hundred things that she wanted to do. She wanted to put braid on the ragged edge of his trousers. She wanted—I will be perfectly candid—to induce him to wear clean shirts a little oftener; to prevent him from being buried as deep in dust as Persepolis; things, I imagine, which had been the ambition of every landlady and every landlady's daughter, with whom he had lodged. But here there was an added obligation, for Judith apparently shared the simple ideals of family ties which had already been violated in the judgment of

Mrs Maddy. She felt that she was being debarred from offices which were her privilege as well as her duty, and she could only explain them by the assumption that Alaric disliked her. That was why she submitted so readily to Mrs Meredith's pumping, though I doubt if she acquiesced in Mrs Meredith's consolations—that Alaric had been always like that, and always would be, that she mustn't expect any more if she wished to escape disappointment—that if Alaric did dislike her, there was no accounting for him, and that anyway he wasn't worth bothering her pretty head about. It was all rather worrying. She hated the idea of living in the same house with her brother-in-law and never seeing him, of his having no share in her life or her confidences or—(and I expect this meant even more)—admitting her to any of his. For Charlie, you must realise, was drifting further and further away from her. The dogged, hard-ridden expression of his eyes told her that he was fighting somewhere—she couldn't tell where—and fighting in the consciousness of ultimate defeat. If only she could have discussed Charlie with Alaric? To have discussed him with the Merediths or Mrs Maddy would have implied a disloyalty, but a brother was different. She felt that she had a right to his confidence. Even though he were rude to her, she determined to assert it. She was ready to risk her pride, which is probably more than an educated woman would have done.

'It was a long time before the opportunity occurred. The height of summer had scorched the plain-ward face of the mountain, so that the short turf was slippery, of the colour of pale gold, against which the black

sandstone of the darens stood out very terribly. On the wide knees of the mountain, at the back of Trecastel the early morning air was sweet, almost keen, and of the coolness and clarity of spring water, but above the house itself the atmosphere gradually thickened, so that the rounded contours of the elms were blurred, and all the plain below was wrapped in a white mist, deep dreaming long after the sun had climbed the sky. Down at Trecastel you would hear the larks singing somewhere up above the white sky; and it was in that diviner air that Judith and Alaric met. It was the purest accident. Charlie had arranged to ride early into Hereford, and Judith had been up at five o'clock to get his breakfast. She had watched him ride away into the soft air, and then, perhaps, she had heard the larks, or perhaps she had felt out of tune with the dreamy indolence of the morning. All the way up the little brooks were chattering in their hushed summer voices. Everywhere the silence of early morning made her seem like a conspirator, or a lover, hurrying silently to an assignation. And she must have felt curiously childish; for when she came out on to the open mountain-side, she unloosed her hair and let it float in the wind; and where she came to a runnel of water that trickled through a filter of mosses into a sandy cup, she slipped down on to the heather and put her cool lips to the surface of the pool. And then she went on her way singing, and always climbing. She followed a cart track that skirts the base of Pen Dyrion to reach the dip between two peaks and enter the next valley. They call it the pass of the Evangelist —I don't know why. There's a little cairn of stones

at the highest point, and Alaric was sitting there, solemnly smoking. At first she thought he was a tramp for the tramps know that a good meal is to be had for the asking from the monastery at the head of the Dulas Fechan valley; and Alaric, you must understand, was dressed for the part. She didn't think it strange that she should see him there, nor even romantic, or she surely wouldn't have supplied Mrs Meredith with the details. She was happy to tell of his improved spirits: up there he seemed quite a different person from Alaric of the Tower. At first, indeed, he looked a little bit annoyed: "You haven't followed me?" he said. "There's nothing wrong, is there?" She told him that she had come just because she wanted to. Of course there was nothing wrong. He was just like Charlie, meeting trouble half-way. Oh—she was quite out of breath! But it wasn't at his invitation that she sat down beside him, at the foot of the cairn. They sat there together for many minutes without speaking, in that heavenly solitude, more completely isolated by the soft whiteness that veiled the country below them and the great height of their station than, probably, any two people in Wales that day. It was Judith who spoke first.

'"Alaric—I thought you were a tramp."

'He laughed. "The mistake has been made before." He told her how an old lady, in a cottage all honeysuckle near Ledbury, had spoken to him as he passed her on his walk down to Trecastel. She had asked him if he would like to chop some sticks, and he had chopped her sticks for her, with just the feeble, blunt sort of chopper that you would have expected of a kind

old lady. At the end she had complimented him on his chopping, and asked him if he were a carpenter out of work. The compliments were only a part of her programme of kindness, for he had done the job very badly. He had accepted the twopence, which she offered him wrapped up in a piece of advice on the subject of beer. "I'm sure she felt better for it," said Alaric, "and, as it happened, I spent the twopence on beer after all—at Stoke Edith." They laughed together over the story. They gravely considered whether he had been justified in his misdirection of the money. "Poor old thing!" said Judith. "How disappointed she would have been!" And this easy way of talking seemed to give her a chance to speak of something that had been bothering her. She brought it out swiftly without warning.

'"Alaric—Why do you never call me Judith?"

'Didn't he call her Judith? Perhaps it had never come to him naturally to use her name. And what did it matter, after all, what he called her?

'"I don't like it," she said. "It doesn't seem friendly somehow. And it's such a pretty name, too. At least, I think it is."

'He was not so sure about that. He wasn't even sure that the name suited her. There was something barbaric and vengeful about the name; he couldn't dissociate it from the story of that terrible woman. . . . "What terrible woman?" she asked. She pressed him to tell her all about it. And then he told her in that level chanting voice of his all the legend of Holofernes' death. "It made me want to cry, she told Mrs Meredith. "But you can think of me without thinking

of that awful woman," she pleaded. "And I want you to call me Judith. I do really—or even Judy."

'"No, certainly not Judy. That wouldn't do at all."

'"Then it must be Judith," she said. "Please, Alaric, call me Judith. I really want you to. Call me Judith now."

'He said: "Judith," adding: "you foolish child."

'After that they sat in silence for a little while, till Judith said: "I'm going down now. Are you coming?' and Alaric rose too, and they went down together. There was no more dispute between them as to what Judith should be called. "I think it was quite right that she should want to be called by her proper name," said Mrs Meredith innocently. "Don't you?"

'The walk down was very lovely, for by that time the mist had left the plain which stretched all mellow and golden beneath them—wide yellowing cornfields, cider orchards which were so crammed with ripeness that the air smelt vinous already, the lazy smoke of many hidden farmsteads; a landscape which sang of content and of fulfilment. Judith sang as she walked. She couldn't help singing.

'"You are always singing," said Alaric. "I often hear you in the courtyard. What do you sing?"

'She told him the names of some of her songs. "There are others," she said, "that father sings when he is drunk. The words are dreadful; but I forget those, and only sing the tunes. This is one of them.' She hummed an air with a pretty syncopated refrain.

'"I think you must have an keen sense of rhythm,' he said.

'"What on earth is that?"

'And then, she told Mrs Meredith, Alaric used a lot of long words—went on talking about things that confused her more than ever; about the sea (Judith had never seen the sea), the voices of rivers, the periodicity of the seasons—a flood of unintelligible nonsense.

'"I'm sorry," she said, "I don't understand even now."

'"Why, Judith," he cried, "you're a perfect expression of rhythm yourself: your walk, the movement of your hands, your hair blowing in the wind."

'She had forgotten about her hair. They must sit down once more while she did it up, lest poor Mrs Maddy should be scandalised out of her life. "But what a strange thing to say to a girl!" said Mrs Meredith. No wonder the poor child was puzzled."'

'And what a magnificent climax for Alaric! To think of him expressing himself at last: all the accumulated ecstasy of his remote musings bursting like a flower in the warmth of that bland morning. You can see the splendour of the field he covered: seas and skies and rivers and seasons. I expect he spoke like a prophet, and with just as much likelihood or hope of being understood. I remember what one of our poets has said of Keats: "Nature was related to him as an enchantress to a dreamer." Alaric had been like that. And now he was awakening from his dreams; those endless dreams of his boyhood, the fitful nightmares of North Bromwich days. There must have been some special magic in that morning that freed him, or some special magic in Judith's presence. No doubt the outburst frightened him.'

'He didn't say much more. It is possible that Judith's virtue lay in her hair, that when she put it up she ceased to be magical. I don't think there was any further outburst of poetry. I do not suppose that he even needed to speak much, for Judith was so happy in the new atmosphere of friendliness that she was content to go on babbling of small inconsequent things. I dare say some of them jarred on him; but perhaps the intensity of his joy in the expression of that which was burning within him carried him over any such small annoyances. A sort of delicious afterglow, you know. I expect he answered her questions in a dream; or didn't even hear what she was saying. But the poor child was not to finish her morning without something in the nature of a shock; the kind of shock that Alaric was always giving her. They had slipped down through the rough field above Trecastel—it was not difficult because the hedges are so broken—and come to the head of the path which cuts the spinney of blasted firs. She had raced down the home fields so fast that Alaric, plodding heavily in the rear, was out of breath, and she was waiting for him by the stile.

'"You go too quickly for me," he said. "You forget how old I am."

'"Yes," she said, "somehow I think of you as being quite old, though I suppose you aren't very old really."

'He gave her a funny look (that is what she called it), and began to tell her about the fir trees above them. When he was quite a small boy, he said, on a windy evening he would often creep out of the house and feel his way through the dark to that very stile, and he

would sit there, shivering with the cold, listening to the queer sighing of the wind through the tree-tops. It was a most wonderful noise, he said, almost as if the wind were complaining of its homelessness, or sometimes as if it were soothing him. He had the greatest passion for it when he felt most miserable—though, of course, it was ridiculous for a child to be miserable at all. He wondered if Judith had ever felt anything like that? . . . No—Judith had never felt anything of the kind. It was a funny idea. . . . And now the branches were so bare, he said, that the wind could never sing in them again.

" 'Yes,' said Judith, 'it was two summers ago. The lightning struck them on the day when my baby was born.'

'"What?" he cried.—"She thought he was angry with her or something, he spoke so violently," said Mrs Meredith. "And after that he never so much as looked at her for days. He seemed actually to avoid her. Did you ever hear of anything more unreasonable?—more like those Grosmonts?"'

VI

'I've been thinking,' said Marsden, 'of the reasons for Alaric's passionate exclamation when Judith told him about that dead baby. And I believe that I am beginning to realise just what he felt. You know all the fanciful nonsense with which you entertained me about Judith being a sort of Dryad?—I believe you caught it from Mrs Meredith, or exaggerated some fancy of hers beyond recognition. Well, I'm beginning to wonder if it isn't perhaps rather pat to our subject. You'll remember that you talked about her as "a sapling tree"; "luminous green eyes," you said, "like sunlight striking through green leaves"; you spoke of her "sweet swaying motion"; her hair "like beech leaves in autumn." Now, I don't imagine for a moment that Alaric saw her through these . . . these green spectacles, but he did see her, by your own (or Mrs Meredith's) account, as a creature expressive of the ryhthm of life. He brought her in as a crowning example of the deities which ranked highest in his pantheistic Olympus : the sea, running water, winds—did he say winds?—and the first seeress, Earth. You must admit that Alaric was on the top of himself. Ecstatic you may call it, if ecstasy is, as I take it to be, something which reconciles beauties which seem on the face of things to be very far apart: in this case the splendour of that sun-bathed mountain tract and Tomas Gwyn's daughter, pleading childishly to be called Judith.

'You spoke of her as a personification of the wild beauty among which she lived: and I'm prepared to believe that to Alaric she seemed—well, not exactly that, but at any rate an integral part of it, and one of its means of expression; obviously, in this case, appealing to more sense than one. I think that Alaric was beginning to realise, or to correct without realising, the error of all his conscious self-suppression, the careful smothering of every new-born instinct of beauty at its birth. And I think it was the presence of Judith, who was more than three parts instinct herself, that tempted him so far to abandon his old position. He committed himself to a new idea of Judith—this lovely, tender, instinctive creature—as the expression of the beauty which had been hammering at his heart. You know how fatal ideas are to the Grosmonts . . . She was a sort of Persephone—daughter of the earth—whom he had crowned with flowery innocence; and suddenly, when she spoke of her dead baby, he realised that she had been the bride of Hades. That is putting it rather badly for Charlie, isn't it? But you know what I mean. Her angel innocence dropped from her; she became a little red-haired Celt with a milky skin, green eyes—and no freckles, instead of a swift, bewildering example of the "rhythm of life." As if child-bearing weren't just as much a part of the "rhythm of life" (oh, the illusions of these Silurists!) as the fruiting of a wild cherry, so delicately accomplished by the easy-mannered breezes of April. Alaric, you know, was so painfully self-conscious of the least absurdity, and Judith's baby seemed to him the *reductio ad absurdum* of his idea. The bathos shrivelled

him. In the old days he would never have recovered from such a shock; he would have avoided Judith like the plague; but Alaric was growing older, and she stood to him for the magic of youth; Alaric had never known any intimacy with a woman, and Judith was very beautiful. I don't suppose he managed to keep it up.'

'For a time he did,' I replied.

'Ah—Alaric was an adept at that sort of mortification. But this was of the kind that goeth not out by prayer and fasting. Judith was armed at so many points. What was Achilles' heel?'

'It came about in this way. The constant attentions of Tomas Gwyn, who had been a great embarrassment to Charlie whenever they met, were sufficient to make him supersensitive on the subject of his wife's relations. Now Tomas had tact; he never provoked Charlie beyond a point which he considered strategically safe for his own further advantage. Tomas had all the Celt's political acumen. He knew his Charlie through and through; he rode him delicately, as he would have ridden a troublesome pony in his gipsy days. But Evan was either too stupid or too hot-headed to attend to any of these niceties. He regarded his brother-in-law as a legitimate prey, and asserted his beliefs without any regard for Charlie's weaknesses. One of these was the principal of the game of laws; a persistent survival, I suppose, of the baronial instinct. Now Charlie hadn't enough money to preserve game; the Trecastel shooting at its best was very rough; but the very mention of such a thing as poaching was enough to make him red in the face and set him blustering. Evan Gwyn, it appears, considered that

his sister's marriage conferred on him the right to shoot and snare as much as ever he wished on the Trecastel land. Charlie had heard as much from the farm-hands, who were so conservative as to dislike the Gwyns for the roving nature of their occupation. He had sworn to Dr Meredith that he would shoot Evan Gwyn. He had made Judith cry—not that she really objected to Evan being shot, but because the suggestion of violence appalled her. And then, one day, he rode slap into Evan coming out of one of his fields—not an outlying plot that was really partially enclosed moorland, but the paddock at the bottom of the orchard—and carrying a bag of ferrets and six or seven dead rabbits with their feet tied together over a stick. There had been a scene. Evan gave as good as he got. Nobody was hurt; but Charlie came back to the house in a fiendish temper. They were all sitting at dinner: Judith, Mrs Maddy, and Alaric—Alaric carefully segregated from the women at the end of the oak table. When Charlie came in they took very little notice of him: they never did. Only Mrs Maddy trotted off into the kitchen to bring back the joint. When she came back she was amazed to hear a violent row in progress. "Mr Charlie didn't half carry on," she said.

'"My God," he cried, "I've had enough of this game. On my own land . . . under the very windows of the house, while you sit here eating as if it didn't matter! The lot of you! Of course you don't care . . . What does it matter to you so long as you're fed and clothed and have your own way? You don't care if the beggarly place is stripped bare of every damned rabbit on it as long

as you have your bellies full. You'd see me robbed right and left. You've no sense of honour or decency."

'Alaric asked, very stolidly, what was the matter.

'"Matter?" echoed Charlie. "Matter? . . . You'd better ask Judith what's the matter. She knows. I'll wager she knows—the bitch. Yes . . . You've got the poacher's colour on your head. You're red as a fox or a weasel or a kestrel . . . all thieves! And now you blink your eyes while your misbegotten brother strips me bare. You know it, Judith. . . . Do you think I don't know how the very larder isn't safe from them? Do you think I don't know of all the food that goes out of the house to feed the foxes?" —(oh, Mrs Maddy, Mrs Maddy!) "Do you think I don't know of your cunning—your dammed foxy cunning?" He brought down his crop on the table with a bang that made Judith blink. She shivered.

'"That'll do, Charlie," said Alaric slowly. "You don't gain anything by making a noise, or by frightening Judith."

'"Judith?" cries Charlie. "Oh, it's 'Judith' now. I had an idea we weren't familiar. Since when, pray, has it been 'Judith'?"

'Judith sat with lowered eyes. Alaric saw her smile faintly. They were both suddenly conscious of the time when first it had been Judith.

'"Doesn't it strike you, Charles," said he, "that you are making an awful fool of yourself?" He rose from his chair. "Sit down, there's a good chap. If you've got a grievance, you don't gain anything by being hysterical."'

'Self-control, as a subject for daily meditation,' murmured Marsden.

'Yes, indeed—but only think what a temptation was dangled before Charlie's eyes: our flabby friend standing up before him with his moon-face, and his suspicion of paunch positively inviting a knock-out blow. I'm sure this solution of his anger must have presented itself. Such an admirably insensitive mass of flesh at which to pound away! But Charlie, you know, was not really ill-natured. I begin to think there was quite a lot in what Mrs Meredith said about his "naturally sunny disposition." He was really incapable of sustained malice. He just stared at Alaric glooming over him, for a second, and then laughed right out. Then he sat down and swore at Mrs Maddy. Did she realise that he'd had no food for seven hours?

'Judith had got up very gently and left the room, and Alaric stood there like a lost soul while Charlie attacked his dinner. "Alaric," he said, "I didn't mean anything, you know, when I spoke to you just now about calling Judith by her Christian name. It's much more natural that you should . . . I wish you would."

'"Indeed?" said Alaric; and then, after a long pause: "Thank you."

'"I'm damnably violent . . . just like the governor. You, I suppose, take after mother. By God, I believe you ought to have been a girl." He laughed at his own joke. "I never understood mother—never. But I was devilish cut-up when she died. You're a damned funny chap, Alaric . . . Oh, for God's sake, join me in a drink."

'Charlie hadn't wasted any time over the whisky. Mrs Maddy had very kindly refilled his glass. In a little while he became querulous: a sort of reaction after his temper. He started to tell Alaric all his

troubles with the Gwyns. "You're one of the family —you'll understand." He came down to the little squalid details of Judith's subsidies of food to the Gwyn household. Mrs Maddy was still in the room— (the details of the scene came from her)—and her presence struck Alaric as an indelicacy. He nodded towards her when she wasn't looking. "Don't you think?" . . . he said. "Oh no," said Charlie, "she knows better than I do. It was she who told me. She's as loyal as can be." After that Alaric never ceased to hate Mrs Maddy. And this story of the Gwyn's persecution, in which it was evident that Charlie imagined Judith to be implicated, led on to the tale of his own recent losses. In his cups Charlie was always *larmoyant*. He told Alaric about all his damnable luck—in other words his gambling losses, coupled with the name of Shrives; all about his unfortunate speculations in horseflesh, coupled with the obnoxious name of Tomas Gwyn ; all about the failure of his crops, coupled with the name of the Deity.

'Alaric had no idea that things were in such a horrible state. And then Charles harked back to the old subject—the obsession with which he had bothered Dr Meredith, the idea that the Grosmonts were a family that had come to the end of its life, like an elm stricken in years, like the crumbling tower of Trecastel. Trecastel . . . That was the symbol of their fate. That great useless monument of stone that had outlived its purpose and its strength. "If only I could get away from the place," he cried. "If only this rotten tradition weren't hanging round my neck like a millstone. If only my boy had lived. All my hopes were

wrapped up in that boy. Dr Meredith knows. He knows—indeed he knows. Everything might have been different but for my own cursed folly. How could I help it? I married Judith; and now Judith betrays me . . . Ah—the vixen!"

'Alaric told him, firmly, to leave Judith out of it. "Your nerves are all over the shop," he said. "Can't you behave like a man and see things steadily, or are you simply a whisky-sodden idiot?"

'"Whisky?" Charlie rose to the name. 'And why, in God's name, not whisky?" How could he get on without it. "Ah," he cried, "it's no good expecting sympathy from you. You're of a different breed. That's what's wrong. You're out of place here. Judith and I and Mrs Maddy are one element, and you're another. You're just like our mother. Poor mother! I was devilishly cut up when she died." He wept. Alaric walked out of the room. He went straight into the kitchen to look for Judith, but she wasn't there. He made an aimless circuit of the courtyard, nursing his hand, you may be sure, and then followed the steep path to the blasted pines. Why on earth he should have expected to find her there, I don't know. I imagine his bemused intelligence got caught up in some cross current of consciousness, even though the association was not exactly one which he cherished. He wandered back again to the tower. He went to his room, and played Bach.

While he was indulging in this rhythmical hypnotism he was thinking the whole matter over, no doubt; and from his meditations a new Judith emerged—not the first shy revelation of the mountain top, our Dryad

Judith, nor yet the fallen goddess of the pine spinney, but just a tearful child, harassed between Charlie and the Gwyns, and keeping the bitterness of her persecution all to herself. Alaric was deeply stirred. I don't suppose he had ever before experienced this kind of pity . . .

'The most unpractical of men, he conceived it his duty to find a way out of the trouble. He spent three or four excited hours of heroic irresolution. Indeed he was heroic. He decided to go and interview Tomas. Tomas! who could only conceivably be interested in Alaric's clothes. He planned out exactly the words in which he would humble Tomas. He estimated with precision Tomas' replies. He, Alaric, was enacting his own exalted version of the strong, silent hero. With Tomas he would be urbane, unemotional, in keeping with his ideal figure; familiar in a way that made familiarity on the part of Tomas unimaginable. I will wager you that he imagined himself addressing Tomas as "my good fellow." And then his imagination, having taken this romantic flight, circled back upon reality. He got a sudden glimpse of himself, as through a break in cloud, a ridiculous figure, pacing his stone chamber with bent shoulders and irresolute hands. All his heroic words went like laughter down the wind. He tried a new kind of heroism. If he wasn't man enough—or rather, not the right sort of man—to tackle the Gwyns, he must beard Charlie. He stood with his hand on the door handle . . . Was it worth while? To go down into the stink of whisky, and hear Charlie whining about his mother's funeral? . . . After all, was there any sense to be got out of Charlie in the end. The unheroic part of him, that part which

had been so heroically inflated by his emotion and had burst upon its final contact with reality, rejoiced to see that even this way of decided action had its disadvantages. The whole affair, it suggested (to save his face), had a smack of meanness. It was a sordid family quarrel, as paltry as it was vulgar. "And am I," cries the casuist, "to be dragged down from my remote isolation, from the detachment of stellar space, to quarrel with a rag-and-bone man over a plateful of broken meats?" His dignity reasserted, Alaric's fingers left the latch. He determined to speak to Judith herself: they would see together what could be done. He stood gazing out of the window. The evening was drowsily sweet. Below him the orchards tumbled away into the valley, and among the dark tops of the apple trees, the little cider apples gleamed like moons of pale gold. Low upon the horizon, drooping to the plain the level bands of evening clouds had gathered; while above, in a tender sky, the real moon mounted to the zenith, lemon coloured but growing brighter and more silvery as she climbed. In the orchard a blackbird whistled, almost as if it were spring. In the orchard, under the gray boughs and the fading moons of the cider apples, Alaric saw a woman walking. By the loveliness of her walk he knew it must be Judith. He took three steps to the door. He stood with his fingers on the latch. The sky darkened swiftly as he stood there, for already the days were drawing in . . .

'Now you would really have thought, wouldn't you? that he would have dared as much as that; for poor little Judith was the least formidable customer of the three. It is a fair example of Alaric's perversity, that

he didn't try to come to some understanding with her over a matter which was worrying his heart out. Instead of doing that, he tramped off at night to the Merediths', and told his troubles to the doctor. He said that, most of all, he didn't want to come between Judith and her husband.

'"But my dear man," said the Doctor bluntly, "surely that is just what you *do* want to do—or to make trouble between her and the Gwyns."

'"Why does she put up with the Gwyns? Are you sure it's a matter of protection that she wants?" asked Meredith. "She and Charlie must settle their own affairs. Do you think that she would give food to the Gwyns if she didn't want to? Do you imagine they can physically compel or morally persuade her to give them food?—Hah? Do you think Judith is a kitten?—hah? without any volition?—Um?"

'"I think," said Alaric, "probably that she finds herself awkwardly placed, subjected to a sort of persecution against which she isn't in a position to defend herself."

'"Yes, but do you *know*?" grunted the doctor. "Have you asked her? . . . Hah?"

'Of course Alaric had not asked her. He had thought it, in a sense, indelicate . . . "In *what*?" says Meredith. "My dear Alaric, it seems to me that you're riding away miles on a wrong scent. Do you know what Judith is? She's not a goddess or a nymph, though she's pretty enough for either—(a fine girl, my boy!)—she's a woman, sir. Possibly you hadn't noticed it?—Hah? Not acquainted with the female variety of the species? At your age, my dear Alaric!

Dear, dear . . . Well, really, it's Judith's business, isn't it? Leave her to it, my son. Leave her to it. Hah?"

'"Poor Alaric was very worried," Mrs Meredith told me. "We found it hopeless to try to laugh him out of his heaviness. And in a way, his anxiety to settle this matter for Judith showed a nicer spirit than you would ever have expected in him, if you'd known him as a boy. Really, he took the doctor's arguments and his little jokes very well. You see, it was quite ridiculous (much as I like Judith) to expect her to act as if she were a lady, or to cut herself off from her family when they lived only a stone's-throw away from Trecastel. I had always guessed that something of the kind would happen."

'Naturally Alaric was not satisfied. Any solution of the question that was based upon the idea that Judith was a mere woman, and a common woman at that, was not likely to content him; for was she not Persephone—albeit Persephone ravished? He walked back heavily through the rains. The moon had now fully risen; it shone with a mellow light of harvest, and all the plateau, all that shelving crown of the foothills, lay entranced, as though it dared not fall asleep for fear of missing some irrevocable beauty that should magically flower and wither in that night. And the mountain beyond was only half asleep. The great, dark masses lay listening or waiting. Alaric stood still in the lanes almost expecting them to stir, or to hear them breathing. Everything that night seemed instinct with a kind of furtive life; so that when the wind, moving from westward, threw the tufted shadows of the hedgerow into unquiet motion,

it seemed as if they were swaying gently of their own will. The plaintive horn of the brown owl only ruffled the silence; it seemed to summon enchantment. Alaric had never before been so conscious of the mountain. I suppose he had never before experienced an emotion that made his consciousness so tense, so acutely receptive of external influences; and with this new perception of the mountain he found the idea of Judith associated in a bewildering fashion. If only he could meet Judith now, if she should come along the scented lanes to him—only the ghost of her, lured into the moonlight by the ghostly horn of the owls—he might reconcile a good many conflicting ideas, find a sort of solution of the whole muddle. But why, in the name of reason, should he be calling out for Judith? And what problems would Judith solve? Surely he was moonstruck. He conceived a spite against this nocturnal wizardry that was playing tricks with his imagination. He set off walking for Trecastel at a stiff pace, and when he reached the house all the lights had disappeared from the windows. He went straight to bed, stumbling up the spiral staircase with his tired feet. He thought that darkness should isolate him from the influences which he mistrusted; but far into the night he heard the cries of the hunting owls, and, in the tingling silence, wakeful trees stirring, releasing their branches, which the evening breeze had entangled. Before he fell asleep the moon had set . . .'

'This sounds, of course,' said Marsden, 'like a ridiculous amount of soul-searching to very little purpose. One might just as well have said that Alaric thought a lot and did nothing, and yet it was only by

these indeterminate paths that he could reach a point from which he could see things clearly, or, at any rate, imagine that he did so. Alaric could only proceed to any action through irresolution. He knew it—no one better—and the elaborate pretence which he tried to foist on me in North Bromwich, his hearty tripe-and-onion materialism, was aimed just as certainly at deceiving himself. It was easy for him, it even gave an illusion of strength, to lay down the law in matters of æsthetic over the supper-table, but when it came to matters of personal conduct he was pathetically helpless. I don't mean that he didn't find a solution, and usually the right one, in the end; but the cost of his determination was immeasurable.'

'In this case too,' I said, 'he emerged from his state of spiritual panic into something approaching calm. He acted in a manner which was wholly rational. Next day he even spoke to Charlie, who was rather limp after his debauch.

'"I have been thinking, Charles," he said, "that you are rather rough on Judith. You expect too much of her, and you forget the obligations of your own position. You cannot put down all the Gwyns' depredations to her account. It isn't fair. Judith is lonely, you know. You've dragged her out of her own class, and left her stranded without any friends. You've picked her like a single bluebell out of a wood that is dancing blue, and dropped her on a dusty road. Really, you're not in a position to start swearing at her. It isn't common fairness to do so."

'"Oh, damn it," said Charlie wearily. "I thought we'd finished with that. Do you want me to apologise

to my own wife. Do you think it would do any good? Do you think anything will do any good? I tell you things are miserable beyond recovery. It doesn't really matter a curse one way or the other. It's no good making plans for the future. This place has no future, nor any of us who are in it. It's crumbling rotten, every stone of it. It's as dead—and we are as dead, if we knew it—as an empty city in the desert. What is that stuff that old Meredith's always quoting?—'The courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep.' Judith's the only living person in this mausoleum. If she had any sense she'd get out of it. Why should Judith be buried alive? Pretty little Judy. . . ."

'"You married her," Alaric protested.

'"Oh yes," said Charlie, with a laugh. "I married her all right. What do you know about marriage? Try it, my friend, try it. . . ." He became plaintive. "Can't you see where I've landed myself? Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. Alaric, why in the name of goodness did you come back here? I'm sorry for you—damn me if I'm not. You must have been on your beam ends before you came here. Poor devil, I'm sorry for you. And as for Judy—why don't you look after her yourself if you're so interested. . . . She's a nice little thing, Judy. I don't mind your making friends with her—only, for God's sake, don't come worrying me with her troubles. I've got enough to worry about already. I've got to ride to Aberdulas to-day, and I'm as tired as a dog. I'll take the dog-cart, and Judy shall go with me. How will that suit you?"

'I expect the beggar knew that Judith would refuse

to go. She had had enough of those market days in Aberdulas, when she was left, like a piece of baggage, at the Three Shires Hotel, in company with the left luggage of other farmers, women who eyed her suspiciously as if she were a creature of different race. At the market-ordinary she would see Charlie for a short half-hour. And then she would sit at the window while the sheep-pens were dismantled and the market square cleared. Sometimes she would wake from her dreaming to hear a tap at the window, and there she would see the face of her father leering up at her. Once Charlie had surprised one of these encounters. He had stood watching them without her knowing, until Tomas called her attention to him with an insolent gesture. At the time he had said nothing; but the drive home, always a rather uncertain voyage, had been violently stormy. "Dragging my name in the muck!" said Charlie. "Have you no pride?"

'This was why Judith did not jump at his invitation to drive to Aberdulas, and Charlie was only too glad to have this evidence of her unresponsiveness for Alaric. "There you are!" he said. "Now you can see that there are two sides to the business. Why the deuce can't she behave like other women? At any rate you can't say that I haven't done my share."

'All that morning Alaric was irritated by the idea that she was avoiding him. He felt that she had made a wilful hash of his endeavours; that she knew it would upset him, that she dreaded a meeting. After dinner he tracked her to the kitchen, where she was washing up plates; it was an immense dark cellar of a place, with a low roof, rather beautifully groined. In this

setting Judith looked very little—rather pathetic. "You didn't go to Aberdulas," he said, trying to be severe. "No,"—she would not look at him. "Why should I? It's dangerous driving home with Charlie on market days. Besides, I don't like waiting about and doing nothing. I don't like the people Charlie meets . . . that nasty man Shrives. I prefer Charlie when he is sober."

'"Judith," cried Alaric, "I can't tell you how terrible it sounds to me to hear you so callous."

'She said: "What is callous?"

'He laughed in spite of himself. "I mean," he said, "that you are not ready to make allowances—you're a little hard."

'"Just because you're his brother," she put in, her eyes still lowered.

'"No, just because he's your husband," he said. "He wants his hand strengthening. I want you to see that there are two sides to the question. I've talked to Charlie. It's the first time I've ever thought of intervening in a thing like this. It's also the last. But you must see that to go on in this way is impossible. . . ."

'She jumped at the opening. "Of course it's impossible."

'"Yes, yes. . . . But when Charlie tries to make things more comfortable, you immediately fling off. It's not fair to him. It's not fair to me."

'For a long time she said nothing. She went on polishing the plate which she had already been wiping for fully five minutes. Then she turned towards him and slowly raised her head. Her eyes were very green: they were frightened, appealing.

'"Do you think I like him to kiss me when he's drunk —to . . . to handle me and all that? . . . Would you like him to?" Of course, this took our poor friend all of a heap. He knew that she had implied the answer to her question, and, acutely conscious of something vaguely threatening in its content, he floundered to escape. He felt his soul drowning in the green deeps of her eyes. He could only say, "Judith . . . Judith," vaguely protesting. And then, catching at I don't know what—some spar adrift in the sudden wreck of his resolutions—he managed to leave her there, with tears in her eyes.

'After this he lived more than ever to himself. He had proved once and for all that he could venture into the charged atmosphere which stretched between these opposite poles without running the risk of shocks, or the greater risk of being galvanised into some dangerous emotion—dangerous, I mean, to his own peace of mind. Because, to extend the figure, the household of Trecastel was so effectually insulated from all outside currents. There was no possibility of leakage. The emotions of these three people (I am not counting Mrs Maddy) were so intensely concentrated; they could only react within the closed walls of this little space. And all the time this pent-up energy was accumulating. It must have been like living perpetually in the atmosphere of a suspended thunderstorm. Even Alaric's tower offered no escape from suffocation. The thundercloud lowered over all the mountain.

'The difficulty was this. However strangely mingled may have been the feelings with which Judith inspired

him, there is no doubt that pity, which is not unrelated to other emotions, was the first in Alaric's mind. He found no difficulty in persuading himself that he was sorry for her. The mere contrast between her lovely frailty and the massive gloom of Trecastel was enough to justify him; and by insisting on this aspect of the case he eventually hit upon a working compromise which should make it possible for the two of them to be friends. I will grant, right away, that the thing seems barely plausible, but the relation was not to be based on any fervent Shelleyan Platonism; he didn't try to deceive himself by any rubbish of that kind, he simply determined to treat her as a child—a rather neglected child—and her own attitude made this arrangement easier, for she usually regarded him—always, I believe, if the truth were told—as the product of another generation than her own. She didn't treat him exactly as she would treat a contemporary or an equal, and you will know that people much more sophisticated than Judith—the Merediths, for example—were conscious of Alaric's remoteness from the ordinary stamp of life and thought, and rather inclined to treat him as a queer abstraction than as a man. With other people Alaric rather resented this attitude; with Judith he found it providentially convenient. To Charlie's intense amusement, they resumed their old acquaintance, more or less at the stage which it had reached on the day when they had walked on the mountain, high above the mist, and descended to the level of the fateful pines. I do not mean that the relation was the same—that was, in the nature of things, impossible. Alaric had learned by his experience

that he must keep a strict watch on the conversation for fear that it should lead them both into a third emotional blind alley. Really, he was afraid of her—this *enfant terrible.*

'For a long while—several months—the compromise worked exceedingly well. I do not suppose either of them had ever been so happy in all their lives. They spent a great deal of their time together, for, with so small a household and so few rooms in use, Mrs Maddy was able to do nearly all the housework herself, leaving Judith free, while Alaric's time was all his own. He had never known another man intimately, let alone a woman, and here he found himself dragged into an almost bewildering intimacy with this wife of his brother, half Dryad and half child. It wasn't at all easy, for he was always on his guard; but as compensation for his uneasiness she gave him many delightful surprises. He could seldom quite get the idea of her childishness out of his head, for sometimes she would remind him of it by asking him the meaning of words which a baby ought to have known; but sometimes he would go on talking for hours and hours without realising that she was anything but a woman as well educated as himself. The adaptability of the child was marvellous; and often the freshness of her vision in matters which had been crusted with usage and convention would startle him, with all the naïve directness of the best primitive art. At those times he would be thankful that she had never been spoilt by education; but at others he would find, after many minutes perhaps, that she had only been pretending to understand him, pretending so cleverly that he had

been taken in. Perhaps she misled him more often than he believed; for she was an admirable listener, and Alaric himself not the most acute of observers.

'"Judith," he would say, "you must tell me when you don't understand. Unless you're honest, we won't talk at all."

'"But I did understand, really," she would protest, and, seeing her more deeply mired by every excuse, he would end by smiling at her. They spent a great deal of their time out of doors, for the end of autumn was very lovely that year, and the shelving plateau, with its broad sheets of turned bracken, was all their own. Beneath dull skies all colour was intensified. In that season the turf paths between masses of heather and brake stood out in their richest green; in spring, when all things were green, you would have missed their loveliness. It seemed as if these green pathways had no end, tempting to their feet to wander far and farther. And now the mountain began to find its voice of many waters; for all the breadth of the green pathways was streaked by the runnels of a hundred gurgling springs, that sometimes dipped into peat crevasses to lose themselves in subterraneous murmurs, and sometimes, dammed by a bare boulder, spread themselves in swimming shallows, which Judith and Alaric were forced to circumvent. Always in their ears played the sound of running water, an when they lifted their eyes to the high ridges they would see the tattered fleeces of slow-moving cloud from which the water came. In the black cups of the mountain on either side of the darens, where once had been nothing but the sun-baked stones, the whiteness of new-born streams

began to shine. After the first heavy rains, Alaric, who had been waiting for them, pointed them out to Judith. He quoted, because he thought she would like it, the lines from the *Lotos-Eaters*, and asked her if she thought they were "like a downward smoke" or "slow dropping veils of thinnest lawn." She answered him swiftly: "No, they're just like silvery snail tracks, not a bit like smoke." And later, when the new-born rivers began to find their tongues, they two would climb up to a little grove of mountain-ash at the foot of the darens, and listen to the voices of the two streams; those motionless trails of silver, each with its own seperate pitch. At the very gate of Trecastel the little stream, which in summer slinks by into the Felindre brook, without ever being suspected, set up a continual brawling. Alaric called it the infant Hercules, and Judith, of course, came to know who Hercules was. It had a strange mythical quality, that autumn of the foot-hills; its atmosphere was so charged with wind and the foam of mad water, black mountain ridges and blazing fires of bracken, storm lights breaking in lurid shafts from tattered cloud and the lost liquid whinny of the curlew. Alaric was acutely conscious of this. It was all too boldly painted, too savagely fantastic, to be sane or durable. Beneath all that darkness and barbaric colour, with the savage cruelty of nature translated into the sounds of wind and water, he felt himself and Judith as creatures poor and predestinate. He smiled to see her so unconscious of it all. He was sorry for Judith. And who in the world should worry their heads about either of them?

'Nobody to an alarming extent. Tomas Gwyn, indeed, had seen them more than once together. He had mentioned the fact casually to Evan; and Evan, who was much less of a gentlemen than his father when all's said and done, conceived the idea of turning the information to his advantage, or, at any rate, to the disadvantage of Judith. He sent an anonymous letter to Charlie at Aberdulas, which Charlie took as an excellent joke. Charlie handed it on to Judith, who did nothing of the sort. The letter insinuated that Alaric had been making love to her, and that she was not averse from his addresses; and naturally, Charlie, knowing what a queer, awkward fish Alaric was, was tickled at the idea of his going down on his knees to little Judith in boggy places. But to Judith it suggested something of which she had never dreamed. "You don't believe it?" she had gasped. "Oh—Charlie!" Of course, he had reassured her. Alaric wasn't exactly the type of man of whom a husband would be jealous, was he now?

'She said "No—no, of course not," without knowing what she said. But the suggestion burned her heart. It had made her blush all over—not exactly with shame, nor yet with indignation. She could not be happy until she had spoken to Alaric about it. She asked Charlie for the note, but already he had tossed it into the fire. Charlie's tongue, a little lubricated by his market trip, kept her in the room for quite a long time. He was inclined to be affectionate—probably the letter had turned his thoughts in the direction of amorous adventures. He called her his little Judy, slipped his arm round her waist, and when

she bent over him to change his plate, he kissed her neck. She wondered if he felt it burning under his lips. When he had finished the meal, he entertained her with foolish small-talk, the silly gossip of the market, an account of his own proceedings that day, and endless—oh! endless—repetitions. It was quite late before he grew sufficiently sleepy for her to get away from him. She slipped upstairs, and along the narrow passage to the door which gave on to the tower stairway. She ran up the spiral stairs, and passed swiftly into Alaric's room without knocking. He was standing at the window, looking out over the intense blackness of the plain. She called to him: "Alaric."

'He turned: "My dear child, what is it?"

'"Oh, Alaric, some one has written a beastly letter to Charlie. They say that we have been making love on our walks—that you're in love with me, Alaric." She was very pale and tragic in the gloom.

'He said: "Well?"

'"Oh, Alaric, dear," she cried, "it's terrible—terrible to think of. You aren't in love with me, are you?"

'You know how difficult it is for a Grosmont to answer a direct question definitely. He hesitated a moment, and then said "No." Judith gave a little cry that was half sob, and, burying her head on his waistcoat, began to sob in earnest. Alaric, not knowing what to do, stroked her head.'

'When she had finished her cry, she left him as quickly as she had come. He never saw her face.'

VII

'It is a wonder to me, that Alaric could muster anything so definite as that "No." At any rate I am satisfied that it didn't come as the result of considered thought. He threw the word out instinctively to protect himself, just as one blinks to save one's eyes from the mere shadow of injury. You see, he was, like some offensive insects, equipped with automatic devices for self-preservation. If he had thought about it and said "Yes," or even, in his anxiety to be exact, hedged, your story would have begun all over again. I wonder if the unusual occupation of stroking Judith's head, the harrowing impulse of her sobs, made him wish to reconsider his answer. . . . The incident might have been a marked dramatic crisis, with passion driving them to a swift *dénouement;* if Judith hadn't been quite so violent—if her straight question hadn't sprung an automatic answer.

'As it is, a quick curtain descends on the incident and for a time, at any rate, you must be contented with only hints, and very shadowy hints, of the states of varying tension which succeeded. Autumn toppled suddenly into a fierce winter. Trecastel, which we have pictured dreaming through all the summer, letting her old stones bask beneath such blue skies. stood now in the teeth of the most furious warfare. For with the north wind came a fall of snow that turned the mountain into a sort of monstrous ghost

and drifted deeply in the lanes, so that the tower was more insulated, as you would call it, than ever. No wonder that the people of Felindre, in their relative comfort, thought no longer of Trecastel. The black face of the darens was all shagged with snow, and above them the ravens, who were hungry, circled and cried continually. When the thaw came, and the ice in the crevices expanded, huge masses of rock were rent away; they parted with a terrible crackling and fell beneath the hollow cups with a sound of thunder that went howling along all the echoes of the mountain. It's difficult to imagine how winter stares you in the face in a place like Trecastel. With all the mass of the mountain to southward, you get the sun not much earlier than in the Dulas Fechan valley, about which I told you, and the deuce of it is that you are nakedly wind-swept on every side but the south, where you might get a breath of warmer air. After a thaw the whole of that sloping plateau is like a sponge of moss. It is useless to try walking on the open mountain, and every lane is a shining water-course. And when the wind was in the east, things were not much better. On its back the clouds would come sweeping out of England, and be hurled, like the frothing comb of a wave, against the line of the mountain, and there they would break asunder and fall from the darens in a drenching mist; so that for days on end Trecastel would be islanded in fog. It was no use for the Grosmonts to attempt to escape from their prison in such weather. They simply waited, in a dungeon, for the spring. I think the first Grosmont must have had more than a little Scandinavian blood

in his veins to have pitched his castle in such a fiendish place. It must have been rather a remarkable life for those three prisoners, in that wintry tower.

'The thought of it is enough to send my imagination flying, for warmth and refuge, to the Meredith's house, and the atmosphere of mellowness and peace which seemed to radiate from that old white-haired lady and the admirable doctor. All my memories of Felindre are golden, steeped in the ripeness of late summer or very early autumn. I seem to remember most clearly of all an evening when Mrs Meredith and I were sitting out on the lawn, talking in subdued voices, while the doctor moved about the garden in an alpaca coat, smoking a pipe. He was lifting the bulbs of his daffodils and sometimes he would pause on his way from the bed to the potting house to break our conversation with some homely enthusiasm of his own. Mrs Meredith would smile at him as though he filled the place of the son whom they had lost. So many little things seem to reinforce the justness of the picture. I can hear the crake of the chaff-cutter in the loft, turned by the fat coachman. I can hear the ripple of the Felindre brook and the soft "plop" of an apple falling into the rank orchard grass. I can hear Mrs Meredith's voice rippling on as soothingly as the brook itself. "In winter," she says, "you forget all about the outlying farms on the mountain. The people who live there might just as well be dead—or dormice. Did you ever keep a dormouse? They're very nearly the sweetest things on earth. Of course, we can never forget about the mountain folk as easily as the other people in the village, for they get pneumonia, and

have babies, and call the poor doctor out in the night just the same winter or summer. But when he does go there, do you know, I feel as if he came back to me out of another world. A place like Trecastel must be terrible; for all the water that trickles from the darens soaks into that slope of the mountain. It's a wonder to me that the foundations haven't softened or rotted away after so many hundred years. Poor things!'

'She was not commiserating the foundations of Trecastel, but the Grosmonts. I had spoken of winter because I was so anxious to know all that had happened in that dead period, the first after Alaric arrived. She went on: "Poor things! I think it is very silly to lift your eyebrows when a man who lives in a place like that drinks. I always felt more sorry than anything for Charlie Grosmont. What was there for him to do? He was only like so many others of the hill farmers; but it happened that the Trecastel land was rougher than any in the district. Old Mr Grosmont had been so wrapt up in his dreams that he had let the ground get into a state which must have been a despair to any one coming after him. When he was scraping every penny together—and all his wife's pennies too—to invest in those silly bubbles that were to make his fortune, he naturally hadn't any left over for gates or hedges. He didn't give the farm any money, and he didn't give it any thought; and unless you're a mountain farmer yourself you have no idea what a tense fight it is at the best of times. You're hemmed in on all sides by enemies. There's the bracken and the gorse always waiting for a gap in your hedges, to swarm over your fields. There's the snow that will

bury your lambs, and the frost that will nip your orchards, and the rabbits that will pillage your roots. And in winter, when the land is deep in snow, or the whole country-side a quagmire, you must sit at home and watch the best of your work destroyed. Oh! It must be a heart-rending business in any of those mountain farms; but in Trecastel! . . . I can't tell you how I detest that house. It gives me the blues to think of it. Never as long as I live will I blame poor Charlie. It wasn't as if he could *do* anything—as if he had any hobby, like Alaric, who would amuse himself at a piano or just sit with his eyes half closed in that strange moody way of his, or Judith, who could find something to do about the house. He hadn't any friends. He hadn't any work. He'd got nothing to play with except a bottle. . . . Poor Charlie!"

'"When I was a boy," comes a voice of the doctor, slightly impeded by his pipe, "a daffodil was a daffodil and a narcissus was a narcissus. Now the horticulturists stick their own labels on everything. Narcissus Barri!—Hah? As if there wasn't enough dog-Latin in medicine."

'"All that winter," went on Mrs Meredith, "we heard next to nothing of the Grosmonts; nor really as much as we had expected. There was something neighbourly and nice about Alaric's coming down that night to consult the doctor about Charlie's little quarrel with the Gwyns. We appreciated it, you know, all the more because Alaric was such an independent boy . . . Boy, am I saying?—but one never realises how these young people grow up. It showed in a way that he appreciated the trouble which

we had taken over their affairs at the time of old Mr Grosmont's death, and the fact that he did really rely on the doctor's advice in an emergency made us feel a little easier about the very unceremonious way in which he had left us—just when we were trying to do something for him. Whether the doctor said something that upset him. . . . I don't know. But we saw none of the Trecastel people all through the autumn. I had meant to call and see Judith; but, what with the garden and one thing and another, I didn't seem somehow to find time. The doctor was so busy with the horses that he could never spare me one, and it's such a tiring walk to Trecastel. Of course, we heard about them from time to time. To look at these Felindre people, you'd think they were too slow and simple to bother about any business but their own. But they're awful gossips."

"'Who is an awful gossip?" came the voice of the doctor. "Be careful of your glass-houses, Constance. Hah?"

"'If you're not careful, George, you'll get your varieties mixed. You mustn't disturb us. . . . Awful gossips!" she continued. "It's a hateful thing to listen to everything which filters out of the place by servants, but you can't help hearing it, can you? And I expect a good deal of it was true. I should think that part came probably from Mrs Maddy, through our coachman. I never let him tell stories to me; but he's always chattering to the doctor on his rounds, and George won't be bothered with stopping him. The untrue part must have been put into circulation by the Gwyns, particularly Evan, who is an

unscrupulous rascal. They are awful people those Gwyns. They never pay any of their bills. We simply have to take them out in bottles, which Tomas picks up all over the country for nothing. It takes just a hundred bottles to pay for a visit. Isn't it dreadful? Well, according to Gwyns' report—instinctively one chooses the worst—the Grosmonts were living a perfect cat-and-dog life at Trecastel. Charlie was drinking—anybody can read the addresses on whisky cases and empties at Llanvihangel station—and Judith was giving him back as good as he gave. That, I expect, was a Gwyn invention, just to keep up the credit of the family, so to speak; for I can't imagine our little Judith in the character of a virago. Viragines—you must not smile at my Latin—never have beautiful green eyes like hers, nor such a sweet mouth. The story got about—the doctor heard it at the smithy, which is a hot-bed of rumour—that Charlie was selling all his available stock. They said that he had tried to raise a mortgage on Trecastel itself. Perhaps he did try. I'm sure he couldn't have succeeded. They said he had thrown a leg of mutton at Mrs Maddy because it was underdone. Such nonsense! As if my mild speculations could be compared with the gossip of Felindre! We took that mutton with any amount of salt. I said that I positively wouldn't listen to any more stories about the poor things. And then, as the winter grew on, all the rumours died away, like seedlings nipped by the frost."

'"Frost?" said the doctor. "Frost?—Hah?"

'We both laughed. "George, dear, you will tire yourself," she said. "Come and sit down with us for a

little." He would never spare his strength, she explained, nor realise that he was getting old. He was always fighting against the idea which she willingly accepted. Five or six years before, she had tried to persuade him to retire, and the suggestion had made him quite pathetically miserable. "What could I do?" he had complained. "You'll want me to go on my rounds in a Bath chair or a donkey-chaise next."

'And then she went on to tell me how, one winter night, they had been sitting together in the dining-room after supper, feeling very sleepy—for the doctor had spent a tiring day—when there came a ring at the front door bell, and the maid had ushered in Alaric. "We were quite glad to see him," she said, "after so long, although we couldn't help yawning when he was shown in." He told them that he wanted to speak to the doctor—"and I, of course," said Mrs Meredith, "left them alone to talk. A few minutes later George came out to fetch me. 'Alaric wants me to go to Trecastel,' he said. It was such a shame, so late at night, and after such a tiring day. I asked him if he really must go. He's so perverse in his ideal of duty, dear man. He said that it was a matter of importance. I said: "Judith?"—you know, one is prepared for little emergencies. No. It was Charlie. 'Well, dear, you're not going alone,' said I. He knew what I meant and laughed. 'Very well, then, you shall come with me, and Alaric shall sit at the back.' Alaric and I waited in the dining-room while he went out to the stable. I was rather annoyed at the time, and thought that Alaric might have put himself out of the way a little to help a man so much older than himself,

whom he was dragging away from his fireside in this way; but when I came to think of it, I saw that he would probably only have been in the way. He wouldn't have known a collar from a belly-band. He just stood there with his back to the fire, looking very poetical and melancholy—that's what some people would say: 'stupid' is my word for it—and rather miserable. I said: Alaric, what's the matter with you . . . wake up,' and he seemed to tumble to the inconvenience he was putting us. He said he was sorry to turn the doctor out on such a night. I told him the night was delightful. It was, you know: one of those clear frosty nights, with the roads like iron and the sky unusually high and starry. He apologised; said he hadn't noticed it. After a five mile walk! 'I don't believe you notice anything, Alaric, but your own boots,' I said, and he began looking at them conscientiously, as if I'd really meant it. Then the doctor drove up and tapped at the window with his whip. Alaric jumped like a cat. It was a very lovely drive. One of those nights that you remember. I can never resist the temptation of breaking the thin ice in the ruts. I think it's one of the loveliest sounds I know: so crisp and sharp and healthy. All along the lanes that night, our wheels were setting up this delicious crackling. It sent little shivers of delight down my back. And the lights of the dog-cart were playing on the most beautiful sparkles of frost in the hedgerows. I could see that Alaric wasn't conscious of any of these things. I leaned over towards him—he was sitting at the back—and told him to cheer up. 'It's quite likely that

Charlie isn't so bad as you think,' I said, 'and we shall soon be there.' He said "Charlie?" in a mazed kind of way. He couldn't surely have forgotten that it was Charlie who was ill. I began to wonder seriously if he too had been drinking, he seemed so sleepy and insensitive, or whether he had learned to take drugs while he was away from us all those years. Rather uncharitable of me, you will say, but that is the penalty of being a doctor's wife. One thinks of those things. And then the horse shied at a shadow, and the thread of our conversation was snapped. A few minutes later we reached Trecastel. You know that I have a horror of the place by day. At night it is unspeakably nasty. As we drove into the courtyard, an owl drifted down from the tower, a beautiful buff creature, right across the range of the dog-cart's lamps. It reminded one of old churches and tombstones—Gray's *Elegy*, and that kind of thing. Alaric actually had the manners to jump down and give me an arm. 'You'll come in, won't you?' he said; and then he called for the man to come and hold the mare. 'Perhaps you'll throw a rug over her,' said the doctor.

'"And so we went inside. Mrs Maddy was there with a candle. 'Mrs Charles is upstairs with him,' she said. I never really liked that woman, although I suppose she possessed one or two obstinate virtues. She was loyal, very loyal, both to Charlie and Judith. Have you noticed that the lower you go in the intellectual scale, the more highly developed is the faculty for taking sides? That's why I hate reading about football and politics; and that's why I disliked Mrs Maddy. Luckily I didn't have to talk to her, for she

went off with the lamp to show the doctor upstairs, leaving me alone with Alaric in the candle-light.

'"For a long time neither of us spoke. The room was horribly badly lighted, and I couldn't get my head clear of the idea that somewhere stowed away in the shadow was that poor old Mr Grosmont. You see, I had visited him there in his last days, and then, just as on this night, the room was half in darkness. Alaric might have been a mute at a funeral. (In my young days, mutes were all the rage.) I felt quite annoyed with him. I said: 'Alaric, for goodness' sake, say something. What are you thinking about?' He said: 'I was thinking about poor Judith. Don't you think this is all horribly rough on her—a young girl who has had scarcely any joy in her life, to be harassed like this, to be tied up to a man like Charlie? Charlie is drinking himself to death. Doesn't it seem to you unreasonable that Judith should have to watch him do it, put up with all his whims, and grow old herself with anxiety? Isn't it a damnable thing? And just because she had the atrocious luck to marry him, she must put up with all this?' I was really rather touched by him. I'm sure if there had been a better light, he wouldn't have dared so far to unbosom himself. I tried to comfort him a little. I said, and, you know, it's quite true, that women are born to lead this sort of life. So many of their mothers before them have done it, that it comes almost natural to them. Not exactly that . . . but they can adapt themselves to almost anything. They rise to an emergency in the most unexpected directions. I told him that he mustn't think just because

Judith was such a lovely diaphanous creature, that she would be coarsened or broken by that sort of experience. 'We all have to do it, my dear, in one way or another,' I said.

'"He wouldn't take it from me at all. 'I don't think you understand quite what I mean,' he said. 'You don't realise what a child she is. She's just about as sophisticated as a kitten. It isn't fair. She hasn't had a chance. I wish to God you could get her out of it.' 'My dear Alaric,' I said, 'when it comes to sophistication you ought to know that instinct, in a woman, supplies more in every few years than experience can teach a man in twenty. If you want to know the real truth I shouldn't wonder if Judith isn't more sophisticated in this kind of relation than you are yourself. You've always lived alone. She's been married to Charlie for nearly five years. You may be certain that she knows Charlie in and out. And as for experience . . . well, she's had a baby, and that's experience enough for anybody.' He only said, 'Ah . . .' and a moment later in came Mrs Maddy with the lamp, followed by the doctor and Judith herself. Alaric looked as if he didn't want to meet them. He picked up his hat, and went out into the yard. Then I had an opportunity of coming to my own conclusions about Judith. I saw, right away, that Alaric had been bothering himself unnecessarily. He didn't understand her in the least. How could he have done so? Of course she looked anxious—very pale and tired; but as for being collapsed or harassed, or anything of the kind . . . why, she was as steady as a trained nurse. You know that kind of thing is so good for us

women, and I wasn't really surprised to see how it had pulled her together. You would never have recognised the beautiful, wayward Judith whom we used to know. I don't think her tiredness made her the least bit less beautiful. It only made you want to kiss her, and feel rather proud of her for asserting the dignity of your own sex. I should like to have lectured Alaric on the spot. . . .

'"Judith stood waiting for the doctor to speak to her, and I was delighted when Mrs Maddy, who, I could see, was waiting for a gorge of sensations, was told that she wasn't wanted. My dear, you have not the least idea how positively charming George is when people are in trouble. If he weren't my own husband, I should fall passionately in love with him. With Judith he was simply sweet. He was so nice that he made me want to cry. It is pathetic, isn't it? when people of that kind are unaffectedly lovely. He told Judith all the truth about Charlie. He didn't wrap anything up in mystery or long names; and he made one feel all the time that one had something definite to deal with and could deal with it definitely . . . could deal with it almost with zest. It all sounded so very courageous and hopeful. He made Judith get him a piece of notepaper, and he sketched out a regular time-table, with full directions upon special points which he firmly underlined. I could see Judith was taking it all in very closely. The dear child had got a white overall on. That simple sort of dress was really an admirable setting for her hair—I don't think it had ever seemed to me lovelier—and it seemed in keeping, too, with her serious face. Of course, she

looked a little puzzled, but then Charlie must have been more than a handful. And George, so business-like and kind with her. . . . I tell you, my dear, it made me wish dreadfully that we had had a daughter of our own, she would have loved him so.

'"When we were driving away, I asked the doctor whether he hadn't made things a little complicated for Judith. I meant all those detailed directions, and that sort of thing. He laughed at me. He said that when people are really worried out of their minds, it's usually because they haven't enough to do. If Judith was always doing something, she wouldn't have time to think, and that was half the battle. It wouldn't matter in the least if she did get muddled over the things which he had told her. The case was perfectly straightforward. A sort of mild *delirium tremens*. And then he asked me where Alaric had gone to. I told him of our talk, of Alaric's concern for Judith. I said, 'Didn't it show a nice spirit in the boy?' But the doctor only laughed. . . ."

'And while Mrs Meredith's voice goes murmuring on in a soft undertone, the shadow of the slim cypress is gradually stealing towards us, the tinkle of the blacksmith's anvil has ceased, the birds are suddenly silent, and we are aware of the doctor standing over us, taking off his earth-caked gloves. Mrs Meredith puts down her hand to the grass. "Look," she says, "the lawn is damp already. You must sympathise with us poor old people in our dread of rheumatism. Please don't bother . . . the coachman will carry in the chairs." And so we pass into the house quite gladly, for the evening is already chill. The doctor

changes his alpaca jacket for a cloth coat, and goes into the surgery to wash his hands. I can smell the faintly saline, faintly alcoholic odour of that surgery still. I like to think of those days, Marsden; they were a most lovable couple . . .'

'Indeed, yes,' said Marsden, 'and I think perhaps the atmosphere of the Meredith's house, so bathed in sunset peace, must have been all the more wonderful to you just because it was such a contrast to that other atmosphere of which you were thinking so much: Trecastel, standing in a lonely darkness only lit by pale storm lights. Don't you think it amusingly typical of Mrs Meredith's relations with Alaric, that she should have put her foot in it so palpably over the matter of Judith's baby? They might have met a hundred times, and I'll be bound that something of the kind was almost sure to happen. Poor Alaric! It shows you, of course, that he was as far as ever from realising Judith as a woman; or, if you like, unwilling to accept what he was beginning to realise. But it shows you also that he was thinking a tremendous lot about her. Why on earth, if he felt that her pretty hands were being soiled, didn't he throw himself boldly into the business and share some of this rather dirty work—take a little of the responsibility from her. Of course, I know that Alaric wasn't the man to run after responsibility of any kind, but here was the opportunity for sacrifice, a mortification which no self-respecting Silurist should miss.'

'You may be right,' I said. 'At any rate you have no less an authority than Mrs Maddy on your side. She let everybody in the village know that Alaric was

shirking his duty towards his own brother: "Leavin' it all to the women—that's their way," she said. You see, she had never really liked Alaric, and I think she was glad of this excuse for slanging him, although she did rather blink the facts of the case. One important fact, I should have said: that Charlie himself couldn't bear the sight of Alaric in his illness. Even Mrs Maddy admitted that he was "like an elephant in a sick room," but it was not to his awkwardness that Charlie objected. He had got a fixed idea that Alaric was a disturber, an unnecessary fourth in the household. He always spoke of "that fellow," Alaric, in opposition to "us"—the two women and himself; and this definition quite suited Mrs Maddy, who was never contented without some violent partisan feeling. It quite cheered her up. For her, Alaric was "that fellow" ever afterwards. Of course, Charlie was very difficult. Do you know, when Mrs Meredith, talking of her night-visit to Trecastel, said that she couldn't get the idea out of her head that old Mr Grosmont was stowed away somewhere, she wasn't so very far from the truth!

They had got a very colourable imitation of old Mr Grosmont upstairs. Charlie had gone very thin—in the last six months he had lost weight terribly, and the thinness accentuated the line of his high cheek-bones. His eyes, too, were flashing in deeply caverned orbits, just like old Mr Grosmont's used to flash. In many details he was ludicrously like—as witness that unreasoning distaste for Alaric's presence—so like, that Dr Meredith remarked on it. But the old man told me that he had often noticed that illness or exhaustion will obliterate the little distinctions which mark the

faces of people belonging to the same family. Disaster ironed all these creases out. He said you come down to the flat anatomical level from which they all started; sometimes he had found a family gathering around a deathbed quite uncanny. "Just like ghosts," he said. Well, Charlie was now very nearly a Grosmont ghost; but he hadn't the ghost of old Mr Grosmont's exalted energy. He was a weak, querulous invalid, maddeningly restless and talkative. Judith must have suffered endless irritation with him, and yet she seemed tireless in her nursing. It was really rather wonderful, *pace* Mrs Meredith, that she should have fallen into the ministering angel rôle without any experience of that kind of thing. I suppose women possess the faculty of concentration on one idea in such a high degree; they can be so single-minded. It's part of their natural endowment, and a two-edged dagger at that. I should say that it was largely the result of these two women's devotion together, with the rigid isolation from alcohol, that Charlie made any recovery at all. Little by little his nervous irritation subsided—he slept better, he regained his lost appetite, and by the end of February he actually managed to struggle out of his prison into such pale sunlight as the month provided. He became a little more reasonable towards Alaric. The two brothers used to sit together in the evenings, and talk over the fire while Judith sewed, and Mrs Maddy hovered somewhere just outside the circle of light, very jealous that "that fellow" should be admitted to "our" company. They tried to talk cheerfully for Charlie's sake. But, when you come to think of it, they had scarcely anything cheerful in common, and,

to go a little further, their ideas of what constituted cheerfulness were hardly the same. The conversation had a way of drifting back to the old days—the days when their father had been tense with his great enthusiasms, and those when he had been lying paralysed in the hall. Hardly a cheerful subject, you will say; but it was something to keep Charlie from talking and thinking of himself. During all these long evenings Judith would sit very quiet at her sewing. She very rarely spoke, except to give orders to Mrs Maddy, now the most faithful of slaves. When Charlie relapsed into tears, she didn't pet him, or take his hand, or do any of the quick spontaneous things that you would expect a woman to do. One night they began to talk about the shadowy Mrs Grosmont. She was so shadowy, that mother of theirs, that they found very little to say. Judith, who had never seen her, was eager to be told all the little things that they could remember. "We ought to have known her better," said Charlie; "it's a great shame that we didn't. I can't think of her as a woman, somehow."

'"But what was she like?" asked Judith.

'"She was about your height, Judy, but her hair was dark and not nearly so bright as yours. She got out of breath very easily. I can remember her sighing very well. Perhaps that was because she was ill. I often catch myself sighing now. We're not a strong family."

'"Don't be foolish, Charlie," said Judith; "tell me what her eyes were like."

'"Her eyes were like mine," said Alaric, "just like mine."

'"Your eyes are blue," said Judith. "Don't you think Alaric's got rather nice eyes, Charlie?"

'When she asked Charlie this question, she bent over towards him quite naturally and stroked back his hair which had grown long, even if it had thinned, during his illness. Alaric suddenly got up, and walked to the door.

'"Where are you going?" grumbled Charlie: "what's the matter?" Alaric said: "It's a lovely night," without turning, and went out. "It's a damnable night," said Charlie. "Five minutes ago it was hailing, and it's as dark as hell. The fellow's mad."

'"Perhaps it was talking about your mother that upset him," said Judith seriously.

'"Nonsense; he never broke down at her funeral. I was all over the shop. He's a moody devil. It's no good for you or me to try and understand him. I expect he feels out of it. Well, he is out of it. He's odd man out, and I told him he would be." Alaric remained in his tower-top while they were at supper.

'In a week or two Charlie was in the saddle again, not up to hunting form, but well enough to ride into Aberdulas and get a drink. One knew, of course, from the first that he would sooner or later slip back into his old ways—that was only a matter of time; but physically, at any rate, his imprisonment at Trecastel helped him a good deal. And even if he drank—as he did drink, without any doubt—the life which he lived was about the best corrective that could be devised for slow intoxication. You know Abernethy's saw: "The best thing for the inside of

a man is the outside of a horse"? Well, Charlie was almost always riding, and what is more, riding through air so washed with wind that it would cleanse the foulest body you can imagine. Even when it is soft with rain, that air has a strange crystalline quality like spring water. It makes you feel clean. But the mountain air didn't clear Charlie's mind, nor the saddle exercise shake the nonsense out of him. His brain was always under a cloud, heavily brooding, and if it brightened up (except under an artificial stimulus) it was only with sudden flashes of anger and mistrust. Mrs Meredith met him once or twice riding in the lanes. "It is a wonder the poor boy didn't kill himself," she said, "for I'm pretty certain he never saw anything in front of him. Once I had to push right up against the hedge to get out of his way. Do you know, we actually got to know the rhythm of his horse's hoofs, he rode so fast. You have seen how stony our lanes are, and what an echo there is in the village street? Well, we used to hear Charlie galloping by at night. And what frightened me, or rather shocked me, more than the actual sense of . . . what would you call it? . . . a sort of automatic activity driving him on at an unmeaning gallop through the lanes, was the resemblance to his father. You see, that is exactly what old Mr Grosmont used to do in the dreadful days before his seizure. He used to ride along in the same blind, reckless manner, seeing nobody, as though he were condemned to go riding on for ever, just as the Flying Dutchman was condemned to sail. Only, the Flying Dutchman was to be saved if he could get some woman to share his fate, wasn't he? And Charlie had got poor

little Judith, and went on riding still . . . It was really rather sinister, wasn't it?"

'Once, at least, Mrs Meredith had the opportunity of speaking to him. He had ridden into Felindre at a great rate, and tied up his horse in the doctor's stable-yard. The poor beast was dripping with sweat, so that the coachman, seeing it, had thrown a rug over it. The doctor was engaged in the surgery, and so Charlie was shown into the dining-room where Mrs Meredith was arranging flowers. She was quite pleased to see him. "Aren't my jonquils beautiful, Charlie?" she said. "You must smell them."

'"I can't' smell them," he replied. "I can't smell anything nowadays. I can't taste anything except Worcester sauce."

'"Poor man," she said. "You're looking a good deal better."

'"Yes," he said. "I'm all right. I'm all right. I've come down for a tonic or something for Judith. She's off colour now. There's no end to our trouble, is there?"

'"I believe Trecastel is damp. I'm not a bit surprised," said Mrs Meredith. "You don't get any of our delicious sunshine."

'"Trecastel . . ." he cried. "My God, if you knew how I hate that place." And then he broke into a long denunciation of Trecastel (the old story) as the ruin of his father and of himself, as a millstone hanging about his neck, as a constant ponderable reminder of inevitable destiny. For the sake of changing the subject, she asked him how Alaric was; and this only led to another lamentation. Everything had gone well

until Alaric came. (This, of course, was hardly true.) Things had gone from bad to worse ever since he set foot in the house. He believed that the worry of having Alaric there was at the root of Judith's fatigue. Never a word, mind you, about his own illness. Alaric was . . . he didn't know . . . somehow Alaric seemed to be part and parcel of that fatal Trecastel atmosphere, about as insensitive and sinister as the tower itself. Why had he ever returned? Why hadn't he left them to fight their own battles without burdening them with his presence. "I began to see," said Mrs Meredith, "the reason for his hard riding, or rather the unreasoning impulse which rode him. He was trying to ride out the shadow of Trecastel and the ghostly immanence of their past. Even when Charlie was most unbearable, I was sorry for him."

'And that,' I said, 'is all I can tell you about that hard winter at Trecastel. You shall leave the mountain faintly stirring with the impulse of spring. First of all, the arums will be pushing out their shiny leaves in the hedges still purple with the bloom of wintry air. Down in the plain those hedges are already strewn with the snowy blossom of the sloe and the flame of gorse bushes, and day by day spring is pushing upward to the wintry summits her banners of white and gold. As yet there is no new green, but the sap is moving, as in sleep.

VIII

'SPRING in those mountains is more lovely for its tarrying. That is the wonderful part of a northern spring. The whole world bursts into bloom almost in a night without any of the shy harbingers that tempt you in the south and trick your fancy long before the earth is really awake. From Alaric's tower the prospect was particularly lovely, for he could look down upon all the drifted cherry-blossom of the orchard which the wind ruffled foamily when the branches stirred. The nearer meadows were sprinkled with daisies as with a white bloom; the little elms which stood along their hedgerows showed a hint of fuller form which they carried, as it were, jauntily. They were far more lovely so than when bowed beneath their dark summer foliage. In one of the spinneys at the head of the Roman road there was a nightingale.

'Even Charlie grew more cheerful; and it was only natural that Judith, in her character of Dryad, should feel this communicable thrill. She and Alaric were as prisoners released. They went for long walks that were full of delight. I suppose that the trial of Charlie's illness had made her more seriously beautiful than ever; so far from rubbing the bloom off her, as Alaric had feared, it had added something which she had lacked before. If she were less of the Dryad, if in other words her paganism had been softened, she had become much more of a woman. You know, they had

never been really intimate. You can't be intimate with a "sapling of silver birch" or whatever it was we called her. You can't be intimate with a "personification of wild beauty." You can be intimate, up to a certain point, with a charming child; but Judith, you must remember, had been not only a child but an *enfant terrible*; walking hand in hand with him, she was always leading Alaric into dangerous situations. I think Charlie's illness had taught her to be more tactful; it had knocked some of the childishness out of her. This, perhaps, was to be regretted; but it made possible a companionship which was impossible before. She was as impulsive as ever—delightfully impulsive; but I don't think the new Judith could have asked Alaric point blank if he were in love with her, as the old Judith had done. I mean that she saw things a little more in proportion, that she was altogether more serious, and that is not to say that she was less candid. Indeed, in some ways, she was more candid with him than before. For instance, she didn't now pretend, in her old sly woodland way, that she understood him when she hadn't the least idea what he meant. She was passionately eager to be taught; and there was so much in these days that he could teach her. The relationship was wholly delightful, and not unflattering to Alaric. I am certain that any man would have found the teaching of Judith a fascinating occupation.

'Of course, it was impossible to begin at the beginning. You know how quick Judith was to learn: how she had absorbed the whole or very nearly the whole ritual of polite behaviour in society in the course of a

few weeks at Miss Carey's. In this season of overwhelming natural miracles there was so much for Alaric to teach her. Always he was astonished at how little she knew. She didn't know a cuckoo when she saw one in flight. She didn't know what an appalling pirate the cuckoo is in private life. One evening, when they were returning from a ramble in the lanes towards Felindre, and were standing, just before sunset, by the stile at the foot of the orchard, they saw the fellow glide out of one of the elms at the side of the meadow and cross the sky in level flight, cuckooing for all he was worth. "Why," cried Judith, "he sings as he flies!" Alaric asked her if she didn't know the old country song; she really might have been expected to know that, for he had learned it from one of the Trecastel farm-labourers in his boyhood. He taught it her there and then, and was surprised to see how quickly she picked it up. "Judith," he said, "you've really got a pretty voice. You ought to sing."

'"You said that before, Alaric. Why don't you teach me?"

'He laughed. "What could I teach you?" he said.

'"You know all about music, don't you?"

'"I know a little; but I don't expect you would like the things I like."

'"You mean I wouldn't understand them," she said. "But I might like them, surely, even without understanding. I often listen to your playing."

'"But can you hear me? I shouldn't have thought that you could hear me right away in the tower. Does the sound reach you in the house? I always thought nobody could hear me."

'"I can't hear you properly in the house," she said. "I'll tell you a secret. Sometimes, when I've heard you playing from below, I've gone up into the passage, the little passage that goes to the tower, and I've stood there on the staircase listening. I used to go there often when Charlie was ill. When I was feeling, oh, so miserable and worn out, I used to stand there listening ever so long. Sometimes it made me feel happy again, and sometimes it made me cry. Yes, real tears. But now you're laughing at me."

'It had struck him as strange that any one should bother to listen to his playing—and on that piano—for you know he had no technique. But he loved her—you see how the word has slipped in—for her tenderness, for the rather pathetic picture of her coming the length of that straight passage, and standing on the staircase listening. Little Judith . . . Oh, it was intensely pathetic. In winter, too. He said: "You funny child! I wonder what it was that soothed you, and what made you cry . . . real tears."

'"Listen," she said, "this is what soothed me." She hummed the first bars of the alto aria from the *Matthew Passion*. "Thy mercy show, O God." I suppose it is the most beautiful aria that Bach or any other composer ever wrote. To Alaric it was strangely affecting. He turned aside.

'"I believe you are laughing at me again, Alaric," she said. "Oughtn't it to have consoled me? I couldn't help feeling consoled by it."

'"No, no," he answered. "It isn't that . . ."

'The evening atmosphere was so sweetly pensive, that confidences came easily. "I'll tell you something

else," she said. "You know how narrow that passage is?—the passage that leads into the stair? Well, at at that time I was wearing a dress of dark blue serge, and when I came back into the light I realised, all of a sudden, that the whitewash had come off on my shoulders, and on my back where I had leaned against the wall listening. And I grew suddenly frightened. I thought how awful it would have been if I had gone back into Charlie's room, and he or Mrs Maddy had noticed it. It would have been terrible. They would have asked me where I had been to pick it up, and what could I have answered? Oh! I thought exactly what excuse I would have given them. I might have got it in the dairy. But I wouldn't have dared to tell them the truth."

'"Why wouldn't you have dared to tell them the truth?" said Alaric.

'"I don't know. I don't believe I should dare to tell them now."

'"But there was nothing wrong in it?"

'"No, there was nothing wrong in it. And yet . . . It would have seemed silly, or childish, or something. I can't explain. I think I have grown a lot older since then. Don't you think I have grown older?"

'"I don't think you will ever grow old."

'"But I have grown older in that way. I think I am more sensible. Don't you think it was foolish of me to stand there on the stairs? Next time I came to listen to you, Alaric, I put on a white overall. You see how deceitful I am."

'"If I had seen you there, I should have taken you

for the ghost of a lady. Why did you never tell me before?"

'"I was still ashamed, I think. But, as I tell you, I've grown out of all that. I'm not so frightened of you as I used to be. Had you any idea how frightened I was of you? I want to know. And do you think I was silly?"

'"I don't know—I don't know. No. I don't think you were silly. I think you were rather . . . No, you mustn't ask me what I think, Judith. Listen."

'In the spinney, two fields away, the nightingale had begun.'

. . . . . .

'A few days later they were walking on the high mountain, for now the winter torrents were abating and the summits tempted them. When they left Trecastel it had been a fair smiling day, a little languorous perhaps, with the heavy scent of the may. They walked with one accord along the road that skirts Pen Dyrion, and when they came to the gap where the pass topples over into the valley of the Dulas Fechan, a white mist rose from the pit of the valley, where it had been lying like a great snake, and stole around them, shutting them off from the outer world. "The wind has changed," said Alaric; "shall we wait until it moves?"

'Judith nodded, and they sat down together in one of the pits which the shepherds dig to fold their ewes at lambing time. Near them in the shifting whiteness, a little group of ponies were grazing. A small mouse-coloured foal, that had ventured a little way from its dam, came towards them through the mist. Its

mousy coat was all silvered with condensed moisture. When it saw them, it threw down its head, stamping, and frisked away. The mist had silvered Judith's hair too. At length Alaric delivered himself of a speech which had evidently been worrying him. "Judith," he said (and now, each day, the name came more easily), "I've been thinking over what you told me about coming to listen to my playing when Charlie was ill. It has bothered me . . ." Judith said "Yes," softly.

'"It has bothered me that you should have thought it necessary to change into a white overall for fear of carrying back traces of the passage. That is part of my trouble. Because you are far too . . . because I don't like to think of you as deceiving anybody in any way."

'"It was for fear they should misunderstand. It wasn't really deceiving them," she said. "Besides, it isn't as if they were people whom it really mattered deceiving. If people are stupid like that, you ought to save them from being distressed, oughtn't you?"

'"You little Jesuit!" he smiled.

'She wanted to know what Jesuits were. Alaric protested that she was dragging him from his point. Oh, yes—they were a kind of monk, rather different from the monks down at the monastery in the Dulas Fechan valley. They went to work on the same principle as hers, justifying the means by the end. But he didn't mean to talk about Jesuits. "I want to talk about Judith," he said. "And now I come to what troubles me a great deal more. Even if you were prepared to deceive Mrs Maddy and Charlie, 'to save

them from being distressed,' I don't like your having deceived me."

'"I didn't deceive you," she said.

'"Oh, but you did. You never let me know that you were there. You were only a few yards from me —the width of an oak door and three or four short steps—and you were unhappy, Judith. If you were unhappy, and if we are friends, why didn't you let me know? Why on earth didn't you knock at my door, and tell me that you were unhappy?"

'She tried to laugh the matter over. "Then you would have been distressed."

'"Judith, Judith, you must tell me the truth. If you tell yourself the truth, you will see that you did me an unkindness. Why didn't you come to me?"

'"Alaric . . you're funny . . You don't seem to understand things, or else you do understand, and you're silly."

'"Tell me . . ."

'"Well, don't you see, I'm a woman? You're not like ordinary men. You don't seem to realise . . . Women feel, well, shy . . . modest, if you like. It's difficult to explain. It wouldn't do for me to have come in to you that evening."

'"Ever so long ago, when first I came to Trecastel, you came in. I remember it quite well. I rather resented it. I was such a crusty bachelor after all those years in North Bromwich. You came in, and wanted to help me to arrange my furniture. You stood by the piano with a duster in your hand. The sunlight was striking in through the window behind my shoulder into your green eyes. You weren't shy then, and that

was more than a year ago. You ought to be much less shy of me now."

'"Oh, but that was so different," she said.

'"But why in the world, different?"

'"Alaric, you mustn't hunt me down like this. On those dreadful evenings I was all on strings—ready to cry. Besides, you ought to know that it isn't proper for two people to be alone like that."

'"Who? . . . My God! . . . Aren't we alone now. We're more alone now in the middle of this white mist than any two people in the world. You aren't afraid of me now, Judith—you aren't shy, are you?"

'She said "No," but that, all the same, she would be much happier if he didn't talk about those things at all. And she would like to get out of the mist, for she was feeling a little bit cold. He wouldn't have let her feel cold for the world, and so they decided to set off again along the ridge in the direction from which the wind was bringing the mist. In this way they would be able to reach back to the level of Trecastel, and drop down by the path which skirts the darens—the path which I had missed when first I stumbled on the tower, and which cuts straight into the Felindre lane. Of course, they found it much more difficult than they had imagined. The whiteness was so dense that they could scarcely see more than ten yards ahead of them; they could not possibly make their course from cairn to cairn of the chain, which are set midway along the length of the ridge—I call it a ridge, though it is several miles wide—to mark the boundary between two counties. In the course of the morning they must have walked many miles out of their way.

Alaric, I suspect, was much more tired than Judith, for he had a heavy weight to carry over the deep heather, which isn't half such springy walking as the people who write the open-road nonsense would have us imagine. But both of them were very hungry.

'"What time is it?" Judith asked at last, in a rather weary voice. Alaric took out his watch, and found that it was nearly one o'clock. "Mrs Maddy won't wait dinner for us," he said consolingly.

'"Charlie has gone to Aberdulas. He won't be back till night," said Judith. And then, with a sigh, "We had better be going on."

'After endless heather they came to a patch of the mountain which is seared in every direction by deep crevasses of peat and pitted with black pools of water; and here the walking was harder than ever. Judith set her teeth, and they struggled on in silence. At length, through the white mist, they saw stretched before them what seemed to be a great expanse of water. It glimmered white beneath the white sky, a vast dead surface, never stirred by any wind. They both stopped to gaze at it, wondering. The silence hurt them.

'"Where are we, Alaric?" cried Judith. "This is terrible. It's a great big lake. There aren't any pools as big as this on the mountain. Oh, Alaric, where are we?"

'Alaric smiled wearily. "I don't know in the least. . . . Now we're alone if you like, Judith. But you're not frightened? My dear child, you're not frightened. You must rest a minute, or I must take your arm."

'Somewhere to the right of them, where the mist

seemed to thicken, they heard the slow clanging of a bell—it floated towards them mysteriously, half muffled by the whiteness. They paused, listening, her hand in his. "It's the monastery in the valley," whispered Judith. "It's the monks' dinner time. Oh, how I envy them! But we must be terribly out of our way."

'They had wandered, in fact, the whole width of the ridge, and almost reached the edge where it falls steeply, fifteen hundred feet or more, into the valley of the Dulas Fechan. Now that they knew roughly where they were, they went on cheerfully to the edge of the white sheets of water: "Look at your lakes, Judith," laughed Alaric. Indeed, they were nothing more than huge expanses of fluffy cotton-grass, so thickly congregated as to seem like a reflection of the mist's whiteness. But Judith was too tired to laugh. They turned their backs on the other valley, and came at length to the Trecastel escarpment, perhaps a mile from the daren path. Here the mist had thinned away, and below them, far below, the smiling plain stretched away in its lovely livery of spring. "Now you may be contented," said Alaric. But she wasn't contented in the least. She was tired out, not very far from tears, and the consciousness of her own weakness made her irritable. Poor Alaric couldn't understand it in the least. On the rough path downward she turned her ankle on a stone. She gave a little cry, and dropped down in the bracken like a shot bird.

'"What have you done, Judith?" cried Alaric, kneeling beside her.

'"Oh, I've done nothing. Alaric, can't you leave me

alone? Why do you keep on bothering me with questions?"

'It was terrible for him to see her limping. He begged her to take his arm, but she refused. "Shy again?" he questioned. She shook her head, and would say nothing.

'Nothing could have been more melancholy than the end of that day which had promised so well. He had wanted to get some sense out of her—that was how he thought of it, on the subject of her visits to his tower, but now he knew it was useless to try to make her talk. And really the poor child was in such pain with her ankle that he had no right to expect her to be amiable. When at last they reached the stile above the blasted firs, she stopped and spoke.

'"You go on first," she said.

'"No, no," he protested. "I must help you down."

'"I don't want you to . . . Please go on."

'He was amazed. "Why don't you want me to?"

'"Oh, Alaric, if you ask any more questions I shall go mad."

'"Very well, then." He climbed the stile, and went on ahead. He was awfully stiff, and felt very self-conscious for some reason or other. It irritated to think that she was there behind him, looking at his stiff shambling walk. He very nearly turned back—Why on earth shouldn't he assert himself? But then he thought better of it, and made across the court-yard to his tower. He was unlucky enough to run into Mrs Maddy.

'"Oh, there you are!" she said. "Where's the missus?"

'"She's just behind me at the stile. She's hurt her ankle."

'"She's hurt her ankle? And you haven't waited for her to help her in. What are you thinking of, Mr Alaric? . . . Well, if that isn't . . ." There were no words fit for her indignation. She hurried away round the corner of the house. Alaric dragged himself up the interminable stairs of his tower. He was unfeignedly, inexplicably miserable.

'And this galled him. Why was he miserable? It was nonsense that he should be unable to explain his own state of mind; he who had specialised in the psychology of Egotism, who knew just exactly his own weak spots, and had armed himself in all these places with triple brass. A fragment of the white mist drifted down from the mountain. It spattered the windows of his tower with fine rain. "Il pleure dans mon cœur," he thought.

"C'est bien la pire peine
De ne savoir pourquoi . . ."

But, hang it all, that sort of thing wouldn't do; to descend to the languid level of Verlaine! He changed his wet clothes, and came down to the house for tea. Judith was not there. He couldn't bring himself to ask Mrs Maddy where she was. The woman's hostile attitude was intolerable. She waited on him with an exaggerated sulkiness. Her manner was rather off-hand, as if she were thinking of him as an overgrown boy under the shadow of a scrape. But he really wanted to know what had happened to Judith. At last he said: '"It isn't a bad sprain, is it?"

'"A bad sprain?" Mrs Maddy bridled. "All sprains is bad. You'd know if you had one. If you could only see her little leg all swollen and blue with bruises (surely an exaggeration !), you'd know. And to let her walk on it . . . Well . . ."

'Alaric suggested that he'd better go in to Felindre to the doctor if it was as bad as all that.

'"Oh, it's late in the day for that sort of thing," said Mrs Maddy. "Now the harm's done, you're ready to do your share. But I'll look after it. I'll look after her, sweet lamb. Hot water and vinegar's the thing for her . . . and keep it off the ground."

'When Charlie came in late, and rather stupid, Mrs Maddy didn't lose any time in getting at him. "It's a crying shame," she said, "a baby ought to have known better than to let her walk on it." Charlie, with a little difficulty in articulation, expressed his opinion of the incident to Alaric. "You're like a pair of damned kids, the two of you. It serves Judith right for playing such childish tricks. Who's going to pay the doctor's bill? That's what I want to know?"

'As it happened, there was no doctor's bill. For three or four days Judith lay on the sofa, jealously guarded and fomented by Mrs Maddy. Mrs Maddy watched her like a jailer. She had got her, you see, and didn't intend to let her go. Judith was kissed and fomented nearly out of her senses, and Alaric, who was not easy under observation, kept away. Whenever he came near her he fancied that Judith's eyes were reproachful. He wondered if she were still angry with him, but her eyes really reproached him because he kept away from her. One morning, when

she was lying on her sofa in a dreamy meditative mood, she saw him passing outside the window, and called to him. The window was half overshadowed by a bush of lilac which moved gently in the wind, and as the plumes swayed, wafting a delicate fragrance, the shadow of them swayed in the patch of sun at the foot of the sofa. When Alaric came and stood at the window his shoulders blocked out the shadow of the lilac. "Yes, Judith," he said.

'"Alaric, do you remember hearing that bell down in the valley?"

'"Yes, of course I do."

'"It reassured us, didn't it? It was nice and comforting to hear it. Different from the Felindre bell, that always makes me feel mad when I hear it. Lying here, so beautifully quiet, in the sunshine, I like to think of the monastery over there. It must be so soothing, life down there. To have all your day marked out for you by the tolling of bells—and such a lovely peaceful bell. Do you think they're as happy as we think they are, Alaric? There are women in the monastery too, aren't there—nuns or sisters or something?"

'"I don't think you would like it, Judith," he smiled. "Religion . . . ah, well, religion isn't a thing that one can talk about, or, at any rate, that I can talk about. It comes natural to some people, and then it's a great consolation. It came natural to me once. I think it only comes natural to people like me when they're fatigued or frightened. I can't explain. . . . But you have far too much life, and there's nothing in you of which you need be frightened; you're too young

and fresh and splendid to need an anodyne. It needs a mystical faculty too. . . ."

'She didn't ask him what he meant although she understood imperfectly. "I knew that you must be somehow religious," she said, "by that carving that hangs in your room, the carving of Christ hanging on the cross. I don't think I like it, Alaric. Why don't I like it? It frightens me rather. Looking at the thing frightens and upsets me somehow more than anything I see or hear in church. The church service seems just ordinary words, nothing to stir you, but that thing of yours makes me shiver in my back. Isn't that a different sort of religion? Is that the religion of the people at the monastery? It was something just a little like that which I felt when we heard the bell tolling in the mist. But when I think of it now, quietly, it attracts me."

'"I don't know," said Alaric. "You're a funny child, Judith. I can quite understand familiar words not affecting you: and I think I can understand the other feeling, too. But why do you worry about such things on such a lovely day? The scent of this lilac is exquisite."

'"I can't quite tell you," she replied. "Perhaps it is because everything is so calm and beautiful, and because I feel so tired and lazy. Don't you feel it's too lovely to last? Oh, you must know what I mean.

And if everything were dark and terrible and wintry again, I like to think of the monastery over there so—so out of everything, and so orderly and peaceful. It feels to me something like that tune which I loved so much, the one that comforted me when I listened

to you on the stairs. I don't want to think of it, Alaric, but it's nice, somehow, to feel that it's there."

'"I will play you that tune again, Judith," he said. He was waiting for an answer.

'After a long pause she replied: "Yes, I'll come to hear it. I'm not so shy now. I was rather silly, I think . . . Alaric," she said again, after a moment of silence. "If you go a walk on the mountain to-day, do walk over through the pools of cotton-grass and look at the monastery—go right down into the valley if you've time, and tell me all about it. I want to hear awfully badly, and you must go and do this for me as I can't walk, will you?"

'He said that he would like the walk, and left her. The shadow of the lilac plumes swayed violently on the foot of the sofa as he shouldered the bush aside. It was only the greater shadow of Alaric that had disturbed their delicate motion. In the sunshine Judith fell asleep, and all through the morning little gusts of perfume wandered through her window.

'Alaric went on his way up the daren path and on to the high mountain. The serenity of the morning only seemed to aggravate his unrest. When he had spoken to her of the exquisite lilac scent, he had really been throwing a challenge at himself, girding at his own restlessness in the face of so much beauty, trying to reinforce the sting of his own conscience by an admission forced from her, almost hoping, perhaps, that she wouldn't make it. And her answer had been merely a confession of the sense of tears inherent in all transitory loveliness; rather irritating under the circumstances, because the uneasiness which bothered

him was something entirely different. Liver—probably. He would see what exercise would do for it. Oh, something poles apart from Judith's gentle melancholy, which he reduced in the end to something not very far removed from sentimentality, the kind of indolent elegiac mood which overtakes one when one is laid up with nothing particular to do or think about. His was a veritable gadfly of unrest driving him relentlessly through all that day of blue and white. It seemed as though all beauty had the power to wound him. All things were too fair and sunny. He wished that Judith were with him; it pleased him for a moment to reflect that he was bound on an errand for her, to spy out the monastery of Our Lady, but when he came to think about it, he remembered that in the morning, when he had been talking to her, he had found no relief from his wretchedness. And it wasn't a mood which could be dispelled by vigorous exercise. When he came to the pools of cotton-grass, now as brilliant and ærial as the flying cirrus above, he was already hot and tired, and not a bit the easier for his walk. He sat down to think the matter over, and found the silence less tolerable than violent exercise. It wasn't really silent there; or perhaps the silence was so intense that he could hear sounds which had escaped him before. He heard the fine note of the wind moving through millions of tufts of grass and bushes of heather. It reminded him of Richard Jefferies . . . some phrase . . . was it "the exquisite undertone of the earth in summer"? It seemed to his fancy as if the sound were the very voice of the mountain itself, and it set him wondering if all this discontent were the

result of his own wilful divorce from her beauty. He wondered if perhaps he were unhappy because some part of him were still fighting against these things, if by giving himself up body and soul to the spirit of the place he might win to a serener mood, if it only wounded him because he was wilfully alien from it. Why need he be so hopelessly out of tune with it all that his thoughts clashed discordantly? The earth was a hard mistress; she was taking her toll of revenge for his neglect. And this idea, this fanciful personification of natural beauty, brought him back, before he knew whither it was leading him, to Judith. For in the bright days of the spring before, when they were walking the mountain together, he had thought of her almost in the same terms, as an expression of that strangely beautiful land. "A perfect expression of its rhythm," he had called her. He laughed at himself, and went on his way.

'He dipped down over the edge, hugging the side of a sort of cup scooped in the side of the mountain. It was a long scramble, and the atmosphere of the valley into which he was descending stifled him after the thin air of the summits. He crossed the Dulas Fechan by a little wooden bridge. Half hidden in the shade of yews of an immense girth, there stood a little stone chapel. The sun was grilling, and he could smell the slightly distasteful odour of the yew grass. Just over the wall, in the long grass of the graveyard, an old man was digging. The sight struck Alaric as a grotesque commentary on his mood. He laughed, and the old man looked up. Alaric bade him good-day.

'He leaned on his spade, and, looking Alaric up and

down, asked him if he was one of the new brothers at the monastery. He'd heard they were expecting several. You see, Alaric had his hat off, and showed the tonsure with which nature had gifted him. I imagine, also, that he was wearing a long black coat. He told the old man that he had nothing to do with the monastery, but that he wanted to see it all the same.

'"Well, indeed, I am pleased to hear that you are not one of them," said the old man, "although, mind you, the lord abbot is a very nice man whatever." He was a Methodist, this old man, and began to talk about graven images with a lot of misquotations, but he showed Alaric the way to the monastery. Indeed, he could have found it himself, for within a stone's-throw of the little chapel he saw that the valley had been given over to the powers of light. Barbed wire he saw, clipped hedges of cupressus, worthy of a suburb, a neatly gravelled drive, a jerry-built horror of a chapel with a roof of galvanised iron. A moment later he came to something which offended him still more—a white marble statue of Our Lady of the Llandulas, hedged in with iron railings. He came at last to a closed door—the door, he imagined, of the porter's lodge. Over the door a cross was prominently placed. Everywhere there were crosses. They got on his nerves. The atmosphere of the place was in some strange way hostile to him, or he was hostile to it. It made him shiver with distaste—him, to whom the smell of incense had once been sweet. He turned his back on it, and hurried on his path homeward. At the corner, by the chapel, the old man

shouted after him : "Have you seen them?" he cried. Alaric laughed. That was exactly what he felt; the whole thing was a stage spectacle and not in the best of taste at that. He wondered what he would tell Judith; and the thought of Judith in her magnificent naturalness made the artificialised emotion of the monastery seem poor and shoddy. He found it difficult to adjust his ideas, for at one time—the period when he had carried the cross in the processionals of the slum-church at North Bromwich—the appeal of religious symbolism had been actually satisfying—even a refuge to him. He had almost expected that he would find something of the same solace in it to-day—that under the benign shadow of the cross his restlessness might fall from his shoulders like Christian's burden; and yet his eyes had been able to see nothing except from a purely material standpoint—the crude carpentry of the monks' crosses, the iron railings about Our Lady of Llandulas, the galvanised iron on the chapel roof. It was Judith or the mountain, or both, that made these things look shoddy, or rather that made his eyes see them with such a merciless disregard of illusion. Were the atmosphere of Judith and that of the monastery antagonistic? He couldn't make it out—and still he was miserable. He was miserable when he got home, for Mrs Maddy had packed Judith off to bed. He could see that Charlie had been drinking more than usual, and this did not tend to cheer him. He shut himself up in his tower, and was miserable all to himself.

'A young man is always thinking of love. Up to a certain age, nature takes very good care that he should

do so, for lovemaking, after all, is the chief business for which she has intended him. But Alaric had passed that age. It is possible that in his early North Bromwich days sex had been an obsession, but he had almost certainly outgrown his green sickness, what you might call the adjectival stage of sexual emotion when every lass is a queen. In those days, it is probable, there had been a hard struggle. Perhaps, again, from the peculiar fastidiousness of his composition, there had been none. And now, when he was manifestly in love, with all the restless ardours of first love, he tried to explain himself (unsatisfactorily, as you would imagine), by bracketing Judith with the beauty of the mountain. It's all very perverse, you know. And yet that is just the way in which these people deceive themselves. They love a label. What but labels are the things on which our serious friend used to meditate,—Honour, Thrift, and the rest? Judith was "Rhythm," I suppose. But it is obvious that the conception of Judith as anything in the world but Judith wouldn't content him long. Please do not let us enter into Alaric's feelings as if we were lady novelists. I'm not in the least interested in knowing to a millimetre the exact point at which the idealism left off and the sex began, or weighing to a milligram the proportion of Platonism and sensualism: Heaven preserve us from the dreary chemistry of sex! Alaric was in love. Judith was in love. A great blessing for both of them. Let us write that down; and may God have mercy upon their bodies; but don't let us talk about them.

'You mustn't imagine that Judith was as unhappy

as Alaric. She wasn't. She was really miraculously happy, conscious to an almost unbearable degree of new revelations of beauty. She was happy when Alaric was with her—so happy that she could not be restless when he was away. With her it was a sort of passive contentment; and I think it was possibly this which helped to irritate Alaric, who was still passionately restless. With Judith dreaming away in this sunny calm, it was impossible for him to find expression. Her ankle was soon stronger, and she was eager and ready to go for walks with him again. To be with her, to see her insensitive serenity (that was what it seemed to him) was purgatory. He avoided her, and when she reproached him gently, he grew almost angry. A week or so later, Charlie was brought to bed with another attack of what they politely called "nerves," so that now he could see her scarcely at all, and this made him more savagely resentful than ever. He would not walk on the mountain because it reminded him of Judith. He would have left Trecastel if he had known where to go. He even tried to leave it and its tortures. He started to walk to Hereford one day. He walked for twenty miles, but, when at evening he turned to look behind him, the black ridge of the mountain was there, etched against an apricot sky. It seemed as if he couldn't get away from its influence. He walked back again, arriving at Trecastel soon after midnight. He went straight up to his tower, and flung himself into a chair. He lay back with closed eyes desperately thinking. Suddenly he heard a footstep on the stair. Somebody had come to bother him, he supposed. He wished he had bolted the door. The

latch was lifted, and Judith came into the room. She was dressed in a dark dressing-gown that made her look very pale, though she was very pale and tired already. She spoke very tiredly.

'"Alaric, where have you been all day?"

'"I've been out," he said. "I walked to Hereford."

'"I thought you had gone. I thought you weren't coming back. I've been looking from Charlie's window for the light in your tower. Why did you go?"

'"I don't know . . . I can't tell you."

'"Alaric," she said, "I'm nearly worn out. He is awful to-night. He's talking about father and Evan . . . and about you, too. Oh, it's endless, his talking. I'm so glad you've come back. May I sit in your chair? . . . and will you play me that tune of mine?"

'He gave her his chair. He sat down at the piano, and began to play the Bach aria. His fingers were hot and dirty. The piano seemed more than usually out of tune—the thing wouldn't come. "I can't do it, Judith," he cried. "Listen to me. It's all wrong. There is no peace in it at all . . ."

'"No. If you play it like that I shall cry. Whatever is the matter with you, Alaric? You look at me so funnily. Play something else. I'm so tired, Alaric."

'He picked up a pile of music. On the top was the score of *Tristan*. He looked at it for a moment, laughed shortly, and threw it aside. Several other volumes followed it. He came to the score of *Pelléas and Mélisande*, and put it on the piano. He opened it at the third act. "Now, listen," he said.

'He was playing it all so easily, that queer crepuscular suggestive stuff. It is ridiculous to play that

sort of thing on the piano. You cannot get the shadow of all that shifting orchestral colour which is as thin as a veil of mist.

'"Why do you say you can't play, Alaric?" she said. "It's funny, it isn't like music; but it makes me shiver."

'"Listen," he said harshly.

'A little later she said. "Alaric, I'm sure I shall cry. Do you mind? It's a different sort of tears. What is it all about?"

'"Oh, I don't think it would interest you. It's a long story."

'"Do tell it me. You must think of me as a child. I love to hear stories."

'He laughed, and shut up the score—shut up the piano.

'"I must think of you as a child, must I? . . . Ah well, here goes. Mélisande, if you must know it, was a strange little girl with beautiful hair who was found in a wild sort of wood by a man named Golaud. He was very much impressed by her beauty, and though he knew nothing about her, nor where she came from, he took her home and married her. He was a careless brutal sort of man, and a good deal older than she was. You're interested?"

'She said, "Yes, please go on."

'"When she was brought back to Golaud's castle she wasn't very happy. She didn't know exactly why. Golaud, her brutal husband, was very fond of her in his way. I've forgotten to tell you that he had a younger brother Pelléas. Pelléas and Mélisande became very friendly. At first she distrusted Pelléas.

She thought he didn't like her, but eventually, as I have said, they became very good friends. They used to meet in a room in a tower—just such a room as this, and it appeared that Golaud didn't object to their intimacy in the least. Why on earth should he? Eventually Pelléas received a message which made it necessary for him to go away. Just as I wanted to go away to-day, although I hadn't a friend providentially on his deathbed to take me. He wanted to see Mélisande before he went. He wanted to see her for the last time." Alaric spoke very rapidly. "Just—just to say 'I love you,' as I might say it to you Judith. My God—what else can I say?—I love you."

'Judith put her hands to her eyes. "Alaric—oh Alaric!" she cried.'

IX

'For all his tiredness, you are not to imagine that Alaric slept much that night. The momentum of his passionate outburst carried him on. His limbs were aching, but his soul marvelled at its unaccustomed lightness. It was a little disconcerting this sudden sense of spiritual freedom. He wondered—for he was still feeling rather reckless—why on earth he had never found this simple way out of his depression before; it was only a few days ago that he had stood beneath the ugly shadow of the monastery half expecting that his burden would tumble from his shoulders like that of the wayfarer Christian; wondering why it didn't. It was at Judith's feet that his bundle of cares had fallen. "Beautiful upon the mountains . . ." Now he was restless only because he wanted to give his joy expression. He wanted to write poetry; but all he could do was to remember the words of other poets; fine flaming words he had thought them once, but now they seemed barely articulate. He didn't want to hymn Judith's eyes or her lips or her hair—only the consuming joy within himself. He would have liked to sit down at the piano, and play what he felt, for the emotion seemed to uplift him on the wings of music. He sat down at the piano. He played the prelude to *Tristan*, and the wires tinkled emptily beneath the tiny hammers. You see, he wanted the surge and sweep of an orchestra: the breadth of a full string-tone—

the airy shimmer of violins. He wanted more than an orchestra. One of the poets came to his rescue at last: "Make me thy lyre even as the forest is." Yes, that was what he wanted if he were to express this joy—the multitudinous song of earth: a vast harmonic scheme in which were mingled together as many sounds as Whitman would have numbered—the surge and thunder of her seas, the tinkle of mountain water, the fine singing note of the stirred grass, the hum of golden bees and that innumerable chorus at daybreak. Nor was all this enough; the earth must put on her queenliest robes for the celebration; not sound alone must she give him, but colour, scent, form. And the morning stars should sing together. You must not grudge Alaric his ecstasy.

'The room stifled him. He opened a window, and there came up to him through the darkness a whiff of lilac. He remembered how he had been fretful with the scent of it a few days before, when Judith was lying on the sofa. Now he found it intoxicating. My God, how beautiful it was! The night was very still; he supposed that down in the valleys nobody was stirring; homely people, like the Merediths, whole villages full of them, were snoring in their beds. He had a fancy—extravagant if you like—that if any of them should wake, and turn their eyes towards the west, they would find his window flaming out against the blackness of the mountain, a blazing beacon of love, that all the world might see. A leaping flame with the night of fate behind it. The torch of love . . . (his mind juggled with phrases). In the second act Isolde extinguishes her torch; the strings

down-rush in a chromatic flicker; she listens in the dark . . .

'Und wär's meines Lebens Licht
Lachend es zu löschen zag' ich nicht.'

He put out the lamp. If only it meant that she were coming back . . . ! It surprised him to see that the night sky was paling. He felt his way down the staircase, that was still dark, and stepped out into the grayness. The trees were awaking, their dark masses of foliage stirred almost imperceptibly; a whisper ran through them, as though his coming had disturbed them. Against the gray-blue sky a bat zigzagged swiftly. Somewhere up in the gray he heard a lark, on the high minarets a watchful muezzin. Was he so high that he could see the sun already? Alaric blessed him. He wandered through the dusk in such a complete happiness as only poets in love or madmen know.'

'Four hours later he returned from his walk in a state of renewed depression—merely the result of his coming to his senses. A douche of sunlight, if you like. He saw, suddenly—so suddenly that he was shocked at what had been his own *naïveté*—the impossibility of the position. He saw, clearly, that the affair must end where it had begun. And he had not practised self-control for so many years for nothing; the idea of a new self-laceration was, in point of fact, the most attractive substitute which could have been devised for the indulgence of his passion. It restored his good idea of himself, which had been rather

mutilated in the pitiless light of realisation. He looked at it in this way: he had returned by chance the night before. He should never regret it. He believed that Judith would never regret it. It had been the most sublime debauch of passion that anybody had ever dreamed of. Now there were not two ways of thinking about it. He must go. He must tell Judith that he was going. He strolled back to the house. The stones of the tower were beautifully mellow in the morning sunlight. With a little shock, he noticed that all the blinds in the house were down. He had seen the blinds down twice before, and for a second he wondered if anything had happened to Charlie. Something like hope—he dared not call it hope—fluttered in his heart. Of course, he had forgotten how early it was. . . . At that hour of the morning most people's blinds were down. He went up to the tower, and began to sort his books ready for packing. It was just as well to be prepared to go without any fuss. He came down late for breakfast. When she saw him, Judith smiled. Her smile made him shiver. He wished she weren't there, for when she smiled he felt he must kiss her. He wondered if he could steel himself against her smiles. She didn't look unhappy, though, of course, she must realise as well as he did that things had come to an end. Mrs Maddy was in a bad temper.

"'I heard you playing, Mr Alaric, last night. You can hear that piano of yours, when you thump it, more than you'd think. I'm partial to a tune, but I must say I don't like your music. It makes me feel mad, sounds all out of tune. You can hear it in the

house, you know, just when you're falling off to sleep. It sounds worse at night.'

'Judith looked him full in the eyes. "I heard your piano last night too, Alaric. Unless I was dreaming. Do you think I dreamed about it? Sometimes you can't believe that the truth is anything but a dream, can you?"

'"My God," thought Alaric, "she's actually joking about it—trying to coquette with me over it. My dear good girl, you can't do that now." He said nothing.

'"Dreams go by opposites," said Mrs Maddy. "A wedding, a funeral—and so on. It's the rarest thing for me to dream, but I wish you wouldn't play o' nights, Mr Alaric. It's worse than those owls. I wish Mr Charles would shoot them."

'"Alaric," said Judith, "I asked you a question, and you never answered me. Was it true, or was it a dream, that I heard you playing?" She smiled at him again.

'"It was a dream, Judith," said Alaric. Oh, he knew now to deal with these emotional phases severely. She flushed. He didn't dare to look at her, but he was conscious of her blushes. They spoke no more, until Mrs Maddy started to clear the table. When her back was turned, Judith said :—

' 'Alaric, I'm going up to Charlie now."

'"Yes?"

'"I'm going . . . Alaric."

'"So am I."

'"What do you mean?"

'"I'm going too. I'm going right away. How can I stay here? I have a little sense of—of chivalry."

'"What's that?"

'Not scornfully, you will understand—she was simply asking for information. He laughed. "It means . . . Oh, it doesn't really matter what it means. You're going to Charlie. It's quite right that you should go to Charlie. You do see—don't you?—that I can't stay here any longer? It wouldn't be fair to him."

'"To Charlie?" she cried. "What about me?"

'"Or to you."

'"You mean that you can stop loving me—Oh, Alaric!"

'He couldn't bring himself to reply, and Mrs Maddy's return saved him from the effort. Somehow he managed to get out of the room, leaving Judith standing at the table. She was staring straight before her.

'"Come along, my dear," said Mrs Maddy. "Day-dreams?"

'Alaric was rather pleased at the success of his interview, or rather of his opportune retreat. It was no good risking any further encounters with Judith, for he knew now that he was liable to be swept off his feet suddenly. If he were to escape at all—and he honestly believed that it was his duty to do so—he must escape at once. He must act in the heat of impulse; if possible, without seeing Judith again. He knew that he was fighting against something stronger than himself (that he admitted from the beginning)—that the enemy had found the weak spot in his harness, that he might even be mortally wounded already. The litter of the room in the tower-top was illustrative of his position. It looked like the

abandoned headquarters of an army in retreat. The books were all over the shop; the music scattered. A heap of black ashes in the fireplace showed where many bundles of paper had been burned. Certainly it was sufficiently uninhabitable not to tempt him to stay. As a matter of fact, he was no longer undecided. Why should he be undecided? He had lived his day, been overwhelmed with a most disastrous happiness, and now it didn't much matter where he went as long as Judith were saved from the consequences of his madness. That seemed to be the one stable thought in his mind; a determination to save Judith, who had now become even more pitiable than desirable. He would go back to North Bromwich, and get some miserable job in an office. He would go to London, and starve perhaps. Nothing mattered except that Judith should be untroubled. It wasn't a bit heroic, or fiery or magnificent. It was just the attitude of a middle-aged man of generous instincts, towards a child whom he had not treated very well. Besides, he was overcome with a sense of his own age and experience, as contrasted with her young innocence; there was an element of *noblesse oblige*—not unfamiliar in a Grosmont—which made him want to do the right thing by her. Or rather, say, the ordinary thing. He was anxious to act in a way which should clear him of any possible accusation of romanticism: First of all, he must be reasonable. Oh, it was all cut and dried upon the lines which he had adopted on former occasions, not in the matter of love affairs, for I think it likely that this was the first, but in other spiritual adventures which had been dangerous to his own sense of stability.

And, indeed, he rather congratulated himself on his behaviour. It showed him that the control which he had acquired so steadily was not to be snapped by a mere gust of passion. Nothing, so he thought, could have been more levelheaded than the manner of his packing. Nothing, in point of fact, could have been more convincing evidence of his inability to deal with any practical problem whatever.

'And here the fabric of the story is strengthened by the intervention of Mrs Meredith with a mass of accredited fact. On the very morning after Alaric's packing, the doctor drove over to Trecastel to see Charlie. This last "nervous breakdown" of Charlie's had been far the most severe—so severe, that it had made the old man anxious—so anxious, that he often drove a little out of his way to put in a visit. And when he came to mount the stairs on his way to Charlie's room, what should he find but the head nurse (that was his pet name for Judith) in tears, crying most pathetically on the dark landing. Meredith was really very fond of Judith; he took hold of her by both arms and walked her gently into an empty bedroom.

'"Now my dear child, what is the meaning of this?" he said. She said that she hadn't meant to cry. It was very foolish of her. Between sobs, she managed to tell him that Alaric was going away. "Going away?' said the doctor. "Nonsense . . . nonsense." Indeed, it was true. She had been along the passage to the door of the tower; you could hear him packing.

'"What does he want to go away for—hah?" says the doctor. Judith didn't know. She couldn't understand. Alaric was so funny, that you could never

quite know what he meant. "Do you think Alaric always means what he says, doctor?" she asked with the most appealing innocence; and then: "If he did go, I really don't know what I should do. It would be dreadful for us two women to be all alone in the house with Charlie. If Charlie should ever be taken worse. . ."

'The doctor patted Judith's head. "Cheer up, old girl," he said. "We'll manage to put that all right. Now go and sponge those pretty eyes of yours, while I go and see Charlie. We can't have nurses in tears—hah?"

'So Judith left him, and he went in to see Charlie. The fellow's condition was a real worry to him; it wasn't a straightforward case of chronic alcoholism, for it was complicated by the personal element—that baffling Grosmont temperament. "I have never known a case which bothered him so," said Mrs Meredith, "and I must really beg you not to mention it to him even now. I think it put ten years on to his life. He reproached himself . . . so unnecessarily too! Please don't talk to him about it. He feels it to this day."

'I promised her that I wouldn't talk to the old man about the case, and Mrs Meredith proceeded to tell me how Charlie's old mistrust of the mountain—which was, after all, well-founded, seeing that it had beaten him—and his dread of Trecastel had crystallised into something very different from a mere grumble. It had become an "*idée fixe*"; that, I believe, is the technical name for it. During the course of his illness, it coloured all his life; the dominant shadow of the

tower had fallen black upon a brain where it was already dusk. He was silent. He no longer complained. He just lay on his bed all day taking scarcely any notice of his nurses. Neither Mrs Maddy nor Judith could make him speak, and it was only by constant pressure that they could induce him to eat. Mrs Maddy told her brother that it was painful to watch him at his meals: he would just go on cutting things up very small, and move them about on his plate without the least intention of eating. These, and many other picturesque details, were a source of great diversion to Mrs Maddy. I don't intend to trouble you with them. It will be sufficient to say that Charlie was showing signs of early melancholia, that Dr Meredith was more concerned for his mind than for his poor sodden body. Even if Judith had not been found crying in the smell of old oak, the doctor would have protested against Alaric's leaving Trecastel to the invalid and the two women; but Judith, who had now dried her tears, begged him to go and see Alaric for himself. "I'm sure he's packing," she said. "I heard him . . . but don't tell him I sent you." So Dr Meredith stumped up the tower, knocked at Alaric's door, and entered without waiting for permission.

'"Why do you live in this outlandish place?" he puffed; "plenty of rooms in the house, aren't there? All this way from your brother's room, too! What would they do if they wanted you in the middle of the night—hah?"

'Alaric smiled. "How is Charlie?" he asked.

'"Charlie's very badly . . . very badly. What have you got the room in a mess like this for—hah?

They tell me you're talking of going away, running off again without letting anybody know. Now, you're going to do nothing of the sort, Alaric. You're the only responsible person in this house, and I'm not going to have you shirk your responsibility. At any time it may be touch and go with Charlie. I want you here."

'"I'm afraid I must go," said Alaric. "There's no way out of it, you see."

'"Where are you going?" said Meredith.

'Alaric hesitated. "Oh, it's as indefinite as that? Then it's simply a matter of shirking—hah? You want to rat before poor old Charlie goes down—hah? Damn me, Alaric, I'm ashamed of you."

'"Is Charlie as bad as that?" asked Alaric slowly.

'"Of course he's as bad as that. Have you been dreaming all these weeks?"

'"Something might happen to him suddenly? . . . You mean that the women would be all alone. . . . Couldn't one of the farm-hands sleep in?"

'"Well," cried the doctor, "you Grosmonts are a funny lot—but, by God, you're the queerest of the bunch, Alaric. Can't you face it?"

'"Yes," said Alaric. A long pause. "I want you to tell me, did Judith ask you to get me to stay?"

'"What has that to do with it?" said the doctor. "I suppose you and Judith have been squabbling? For Heaven's sake, try to see things in the right proportion. Your brother's in a bad way. You're the only man in the house. You've got to behave like one. You must stay here until he's out of danger.

Then you can settle your little differences. Now you've got to face the facts—hah?"

'"He really took it awfully well," said Mrs Meredith, for the doctor was very angry. Alaric's attitude seemed so unnatural, so perverse, that he was bound to give it him strong. And then, at last, Alaric said that he would stay. George says that he never saw a man look more miserable. He was just like a child when it is told that it can't go to a party because some one is ill. His point of view was just as unreasoning and selfish as that. But all the Grosmonts were selfish—the whole family except Alaric's mother; and you would have thought also that being so like his mother, in the eyes, I mean—he might have inherited a little of her temperament. They were very kind eyes too; but remote, you know—eyes that didn't seem to realise anything close to. I suppose it's quite right to call eyes 'the windows of the soul,' because windows don't make the least difference to what's inside, do they?" The old lady laughed.

'Of course, the main interest of this rather distracting period is the relation between Judith and Alaric. You can imagine that Alaric had a very rough time of it. To make up his mind to anything so definite as leaving Trecastel in a single night had been a difficult feat, and all the more difficult seeing that he was infected with the poison which is most conducive to moral lassitude. Dr Meredith's reproaches had hurt him. To be reproached as unmanly, when he was doing perhaps the most manly thing he had ever done in his life, was sufficiently irritating in itself. And it was impossible for him to explain the position. For

himself he was quite ready to do so—he really liked and respected the doctor; but an explanation involved Judith, for whose sake he was running away, for whose sake he was now invited to stay. When old Meredith left him, he felt very sore. Somehow his usual specific, the assumption of hard-headed, everyday materialism wouldn't act. He was more or less exhausted; and in this state of exhaustion he was bowled over by the kind of mystical fatalism to which all the Grosmonts were prone. He began to see his discomfiture as the toll which nature was taking of his own unfortunate temperament; to gird at Trecastel, which had been his father's and Charlie's undoing; to look upon the whole muddle as the natural penalty for his dabbling in emotional beauty instead of sticking to the daily contemplation of abstract virtues and . . . tripe and onions. Well, he must go through with it: that was all. But he felt that he would go through with it in a protesting pre-destinate fashion, with the consciousness of ultimate failure hanging over him as inevitably as those dark ridges. Through the back window of the tower he saw the darens rising up black as night, an unbroken barrier of frowning stone reared far above the top of the casement, shutting out blue sky. You know he was not absolutely without humour. His sombre broodings resolved themselves at last into an overwhelming sense of the situation's comedy. He was conscious of Olympian laughter, which awoke an echo somewhere in the back of his mind. He tried to see the situation from a point removed from the stage of all these comical cross-purposes. He meditated on the whole scene in this perspective. He saw himself

loving Judith, and leaving her open to the caprices of the fate which was destroying Charlie; Judith, courting inevitable disaster by begging him to stay; Charlie, the husband, unconsciously making it impossible for her lover to leave her; old Meredith lecturing him on his moral obligations to tempt Providence; Providence playing hell with the lot of them. It was really rather funny. Do you remember how I told you of Alaric walking along the Felindre lane with me, just after I had found him out in a convenient lie . . . the perambulator incident, and of how he suddenly said: "That was rather comical about the perambulator, eh?" and gave an extraordinary deep chuckle? That was what he did now, sitting among the litter of packing in his tower-top. He sat and chuckled.

'He was going to make the best of it; but he didn't know in the least what would happen when he came to deal with Judith. He rather suspected that she was at the bottom of Dr Meredith's interview with him; and it seemed to him that the only fair thing was to avoid her as much as possible, to keep at a safe distance. He couldn't trust her, or rather he couldn't trust her frankness, not to betray them into some impossible passionate situation. He reproached himself for the last—for that wonderful moment. At any rate nothing of that kind should happen again.

'They met, of course, at meal-times, but Mrs Maddy was usually at the table, and they talked of nothing but very ordinary things. He congratulated himself on his isolation in the tower. It made it possible for him to live his own life to himself, and Judith was very

much of a prisoner in Charlie's room. The most irritating part of the business was that Dr Meredith persisted in treating him as the responsible person, the head of the house. Meredith did this deliberately; he thought it was good for Alaric to impress him with his own importance, and, of course, there were many things that he couldn't say to Judith and wouldn't say to Mrs Maddy. Alaric listened to him patiently, and his intensely abstracted attitude irritated the doctor. He expected Alaric to make intelligent comments, to say the usual encouraging things which doctors expect from their patients—a little appreciative flattery. After all, that was just about as much payment as he was ever likely to get from the Grosmonts.

'"I can't make him out," the doctor complained to Mrs Meredith. "Upon my word, I don't know which is the madder, he or Charlie."

'"Alaric was always like that," said Mrs Meredith soothingly. "No, not like this . . ." the doctor declared.

'Judith encouraged by the success of the old man's intervention in getting Alaric to stay, hinted to him that Alaric was not as friendly as he might be.

'"Don't expect anything from a Grosmont, my dear,' he said, "and then you won't be disappointed. They find it difficult to do things. I dare say he's really very fond of you."

'Judith blushed.

'As a matter of fact it was extremely fortunate that Judith had got hold of Dr Meredith in time; for Charlie went steadily downhill. It's difficult for any one who isn't a doctor to realise how crafty these dipso-

maniacs are. You would have thought that, isolated in this way, with only the two women to attend him, it would have been impossible for Grosmont to get any liquor. Certainly Judith thought he was getting none; but, as days went by, the doctor became suspicious. He was positive that Charlie was still drinking. He questioned everybody in the house sharply, but could get no satisfaction from them. I think it probable that the weak spot in Charlie's defences was Mrs Maddy, or rather Mrs Maddy's blind devotion to "her boy," as she called him. Charlie could always get round Mrs Maddy. When he was left alone with her, he would start his pleadings—he would play upon Mrs Maddy's matronly feelings. "A little drop won't hurt me," he would plead. Mrs Maddy would yield to the extent of the little drop. "Little drops of water" . . . and so on. I expect he got through a bottle or so a day. The Trecastel cellar had been prepared for a siege of this kind. And Mrs Maddy swore that black was white : a tender-hearted woman, Mrs Maddy.

'And so Charlie—alternating between the deepest depression and snatches of mild exaltation—drifted stormily into another real attack of delirium. The nurses had a terrible time of it. Old Meredith was more anxious than ever. Alaric, in his tower-top, only heard the rumour of their troubles, as one hears at Trecastel the noise of thunder in the valley of the Dulas Fawr. It only meant that he saw less than ever of Judith, and for this reason he almost hated Charlie fiercely. Those little glimpses of Judith were all that his soul fed on. He had to admit it. He was living from one glimpse to another, waiting anxiously

for the slow succession of meal-times, when he would see her come into the room, rather pale in her white overall, and speak perhaps one word to her, the most arid commonplace. Mrs Maddy was always there, and the woman's chatter maddened him; but that didn't really matter, for by infinitely small degrees he had managed to move his chair round to the other end of the table—so gradually that no one had noticed it, and at last he had reached a point at which he could watch Judith sitting in light from the cover of a comfortable darkness. In his own deliberate way he became a connoisseur of her beauty, making an eager collection of all its varying aspects—the lovely tired poise of her head, the soft reproachfulness of her eyes, above all, her lips, when he watched her talking to Mrs Maddy. He thought Judith's lips more beautiful than anything in the world—and he had never kissed her! It maddened him to think that in that one moment of passion they had not kissed; for now it could never happen. That memory, at any rate, was denied him.

'You see, he was perfectly consistent according to his own rights. He would really much rather have run away even now. He was as rigid as ever in his determination not to meet Judith under circumstances which might be dangerous to their peace; and Judith, it seemed, accepted the conditions. He would not make love to her—he would not even give himself the chance of making love to her; but that need not prevent his exulting in the joy of being in love, or feeding his fancy on all that was exquisite in her. As well forbid him to rejoice in the beauty of clouds or

trees or stars. . . . He could not trust himself. He was proud of this assurance. As long as he need not meet her alone, or touch her, or talk with her, he knew he was safe; but if once he had been compelled to leave his lofty isolation and take his part in the business on which she was engaged, moving regularly on the same plane as she, he would not be answerable for the consequences—Charlie or no Charlie. As a matter of fact, he only saw his brother once. It was just before the acute onset of the delirium, when Charlie lay exhausted, fathoms deep in depression. He sent a special message by Mrs Maddy for Alaric to go and see him. Alaric went, and found him vaguely emotional,—talking about his mother, the decay of the family, the Gwyns, Judith. "Poor little Judy!" he said. "Promise me, Alaric—it's the last thing I shall ask you; damn it, it's the only thing I've ever asked you—promise me that you'll look after little Judy." He wouldn't be contented until Alaric had given him a formal undertaking. "I know you don't really like her, and of course she's very different from us—more different from you than from me; but I'm done for, I'm done for, Alaric, and I don't feel as if I'd used her fairly."

'Alaric very nearly told him everything there and then; he felt the same pricking sense of *noblesse oblige* —the conviction that it would be unworthy of him to accept this trust with his tongue in his cheek; but, before he could decide exactly how to express it Charlie had swerved off on another track—he was sobbing over the shadow of Trecastel, which made life a long night to him. And then, almost as quickly,

he began to entreat Alaric, with the same tears in his eyes, to get him a drink. "They don't understand my case. Old Meredith is a temperance fanatic. I've been used to it—I've always been used to it—and if I'm cut off from it like this—absolutely cut off—it's bound to kill me. My head won't stand the strain. My God! if you could hear my heart pounding away in the night like an engine. It shakes me to pieces."

'Judith was waiting on the landing when he came out. He wondered if she had heard what Charlie had said. He was frightened. Without speaking, he plunged into the narrow passage that leads to the tower staircase.

'And in this unimaginable manner they went on for several weeks. Of course, everybody—even Dr Meredith—was in a state of tension. In some ways the case baffled him. He could never be sure that Charlie was cut off from supplies; and, though he suspected Mrs Maddy, to get rid of her would have meant depriving the household of its most useful member—the only person who was qualified to do the dirty work—and Judith of a really zealous attendant. But that wasn't the only difficulty. It seemed as if he could not hit on anything that would keep Charlie quiet—that would damp the conflagration which was raging in his brain and threatened to shrivel up the little reason that was left. He had tried nearly every sedative known to medicine, but nothing could stop the man's ceaseless, meaningless chatter. Night and day the fire flickered on; even in those little snatches of sleep, it only smouldered. And Charlie slept very seldom. At last the doctor hit on a drug which he had not been anxious

to try—partly, I imagine, because he was old-fashioned and rather frightened of using modern weapons, for fear he should miscalculate their strength. He tried hypodermic injections of hyoscin, a poison which had been forced into notoriety by an unsavoury murder trial; and then, for the first time, Charlie managed to get a night's sleep. Meredith was immensely pleased. Sleep was what Charlie needed most. The experiment had been made—a young man would laugh at the caution with which he had made it—and now there was a chance that he would pull through. Of course, the irritable excitement was only the surface manifestation of the trouble—the broken water, if you will, foaming above an unfathomed sea of gloom; but you can imagine how great a relief came to his nurses when once the demons stopped their chattering in Charlie's head. He awoke horribly weak. Before this he hadn't realised his weakness. Now he only wanted to die.

'"I wish I had died in the night," he whispered to the doctor. "Don't encourage them to think I shall live. I know better. My thoughts are all waving. I want to die now. Isn't it damned hot?" Meredith laughed. "You're just beginning to feel your weakness, Charles. Yesterday you were too ill to bother about living or dying. Another night's sleep, and you'll begin to look forward to next season's cubbing—hah? Marvellous stuff this." He sent Judith away to sterilise his syringe.

'I have said that it was a relief to Judith and Mrs Maddy, and yet, like their patient, they only realised how tired they were when this little respite came.

It was so strange to see Charlie lying there silent, neither chattering nor twitching, that Judith wondered once or twice if he were dead, for the doctor had boasted to her that the saving drug was dangerous. And then she began to wonder what it would be like if he were really dead. She hadn't had time for speculation of this kind before. Her heart gave a jump—for she caught herself wondering, perfectly naturally, just as one may disturb the insanest thoughts in a dream, why on earth they didn't let him die. It seemed, for a moment, as if they were only building up further trouble for him and for themselves; for she knew that, if this were not the last attack, others must come—the same wearing anxiety, the same gray vigils, the same nightmare of meaningless words. At first the idea had shocked her—made her feel no better than a murderess, but when she came to think it over, it seemed perfectly reasonable. You see, she hadn't been brought up to make a fetish of human life in the modern way, and Charlie, although he never lacked apologists, was really a bit of a brute. Mrs Maddy interrupted her rather listless reasoning.

'"Sleepin'?" she asked. "It's all right, that stuff, isn't it?" Judith said that it was difficult to tell if he were asleep or awake, he breathed so quietly; just now she had gone quite close to listen to his breathing—she thought it had stopped.

'"Oh my!" . . . said Mrs Maddy. "Don't talk of such things, my dear. I thought I'd just have a look at you on my way up. You needn't trouble to knock me at one—I've took the alarum clock up with me. He looks like an angel sleeping there—doesn't

he? Poor soul! . . . I think there's thunder in the air. It's so close. Shall I get you a cup of tea before I go up, or a drop of hot milk?"

'Judith shook her head, and Mrs Maddy shuffled out. She didn't think any more of what would happen if Charlie died. She was too sleepy to think of the same things for very long together, and to guess at the intricate unfolding of the future was an effort. Her thoughts circled back like tired birds upon things and places which she remembered well. She thought of the day when Alaric and she had walked together up the high mountain in the early spring, when the summits were laid in a white mist, and they had lost their way. She remembered how they had started to walk along the ridge, passing from the region of tussocky grasses where the ponies grazed, into wide acres of heather, where walking made her thighs ache. There seemed to be no end to that heather. And after the heather, they came into a belt scarred with deep crevasses of peat and pitted with shallow peaty pools—as black as if they had been very deep. All around them the shifting whiteness . . . She was beginning to get cross with Alaric, because he walked with such long strides and tired her so. When he spoke to her, she answered him shortly, and he was so close to her in the mist that she could see how puzzled his eyes were. And then, through the whiteness, she saw before them the wide expanse of the cotton-grass lakes—a vast dead surface, reflecting the whiteness of the sky, unstirred by any wind. But this time, of course, she was not puzzled. For she knew that the white lakes were only tufted

cotton-grass. But they stood together, hand in hand, just as they had done before. It was funny that they should do the same things in the same order again. Perhaps the first time—the time when the white lakes had frightened them—had been only a dream; but if it had been only a dream, how on earth should they have discovered that the lakes weren't real water? For the first time it was surely not a dream. She asked Alaric. "Sometimes you can't believe that the truth is anything but a dream, can you?" And those words, too, seemed familiar. Life seemed full of mad jumbles of this kind. She said: "I asked you a question, Alaric, and you never answered me. Was it true, or was it a dream?" He said "Listen." Somewhere to the right of them, where the mist seemed to thicken, she heard the slow clanging of the bell. Of course . . . That was just what she had been wanting in her tiredness—the peace of that monastery down in the Dulas valley, dreaming under its curtains of mist. Life down there must be so soothing. To have all your day marked out for you by the tolling of bells—and such a peaceful bell too! . . . . The sound of that bell was very restful to her. She said: "Will you take me there, Alaric?" Alaric didn't answer, and when she turned she saw that Alaric had gone. She grew suddenly frightened. The mountain had gone. She was conscious of nothing but the white mist swirling away upon the wind. She was back in Charlie's bedroom. Charlie was standing by the bed laughing at her. He'd no business to be up. He might kill himself if he attempted tricks of that kind. She cried out to him. "Charlie, what are

you doing?" and the sound of her own voice woke her with a start. The room was very still; outside in the darkness the owls echoed her cry; but Charlie wasn't out of bed at all. He lay there quite quietly, with one arm outstretched above the coverlet. What a mercy it was that he should still be sleeping! Very gently she pulled the quilt over Charlie's arm, so gently that the lightest sleeper would not have wakened. She lit another night-light, for the one which had been lit at dusk was flaring away its last film of wax. Her hand trembled as she lit it. It was a shame that such a beautifully peaceful dream should be broken so roughly. Her hand had trembled because she was still frightened —frightened, and so terribly overworn; she could feel her heart fluttering like a kitten's. She wanted to cry —to tell some one all about it. Why shouldn't she go to Alaric? It was his fault; the dream was all about him. She remembered what he told her when she was lying on the sofa with her sprained ankle. "If you were unhappy, and we were friends, why didn't you let me know? . . . Why didn't you come to me, Judith?" And surely that funny night couldn't make as much difference as all that. Why shouldn't she go to him? She looked at the clock. It was midnight. Alaric would probably be awake, reading in the tower. He had never broken his North Bromwich habits of late hours. She knew she was going to cry, and oh! she wanted to cry to some one—Alaric for choice. In another hour Mrs Maddy would relieve her . . . and then Alaric would be gone to bed, and she would have to cry all alone. Surely it was safe to leave Charlie now? She stepped softly to the bedside. Yes, he was

fast asleep. He had never stirred in the least since she covered his arm. He was breathing so softly that she couldn't tell if he were breathing at all. Earlier in the night, it had frightened her to see him like that. Now she knew it was all right. Why shouldn't she leave him—just for half an hour, or perhaps even less?

'She slipped out on to the landing. The house was very dark; perhaps it seemed darker because she was still frightened by her dream. She wanted to run along the corridor, but all the floor boards creaked—loud enough almost, she thought, to wake Charlie. Soon she had reached the narrow passage, and when she came to the staircase she saw the door of Alaric's room outlined in chinks of light. Alaric heard her step; he came to the door to let her in. She just held out her arms to him, and burst into tears.

'"Alaric," she sobbed. "I'm so tired and wretched, and I've no one to go to. Do you mind my coming here?"

'What in the world could he do, with this passionately loved creature clinging to him? All that night he had been thinking of little else but her beauty—seated in his chair he had dreamed of it; and now all that warm loveliness was sheltering in his arms. She had come to him like a child to be comforted. And he loved her so. He kissed her wet eyes, her cheeks, her mouth; and he comforted her with words that were not strange to his lips, though she had never heard them. Her sobs shook her less cruelly. She gave a little broken sigh. "Alaric, dear," she whispered, "I'm so tired."

'"Judith—my beautiful one, my child." He sat on the end of the sofa, and she lay back with his arms still about her.

'"May I stay here?" she said. "When you hold me like that I feel stronger. I should like to fall asleep like this. . . . I'm so sleepy."

'"If you could only stay there always. . . . I should like to hold you for ever."

'In a little while she looked up at him, smiling faintly.

'"Alaric—was it wrong of me to come, was it very wrong?"

'"Wrong? . . . Everything about you is utterly beautiful, oh, and utterly right! Judith—I love you."

'She sighed again, and for a long time they were silent.

'Suddenly Judith started. "I hear some one, Alaric—Quick! Somebody's calling, downstairs . . . somebody's crying. . . .'

'"What do you mean?" he asked gently. "What a nervous child you are."

'She freed herself quickly from his arms. "Somebody's coming," she whispered. "I hear them in the passage." She stepped swiftly to the door and slipped the bolt. Alaric blew out the lamp. Mrs Maddy was running up the steps: "Mr Alaric!" she cried. "Mr Alaric!" She was frightfully out of breath. She beat on the door with the palms of her hands. "Mr Alaric, are you awake? . . . Mr Alaric!"

'Alaric spoke in a steady voice. "Yes—what is it?"

'"The doctor—quick, the doctor, sir. Oh, you must run."

'"Why, what's the matter?"

'"Mr Charlie, sir—I believe he's passed away. Oh,

I believe he's dead—dead. And the missus is nowhere to be seen. Oh! my breath! Oh, Mr Alaric, be quick, be quick."

'Judith, who was crouched upon the sofa, burst into an awful fit of sobbing. Alaric shot back the bolt of the door, and left her lying there.'

X

'"MAY had been a very dry month that year," said Mrs Meredith, "and that was a great mercy, for I don't think the doctor ever had such a driving time, poor man. Mrs Matthews over at the inn at Llandulas had been having a baby;—they're such nervous people those Matthews!—and right at the other end of the mountain, old Mr Prosser of Pen Dyrion farm was dying. If the mountain had been wet, I don't know how he could have done the work, for he had to visit Trecastel twice a day. When, at last, he got Charlie a night's rest it was a great relief to us, and next day the weather broke. I had been down the garden in the evening, and I remember noticing how low the Felindre brook was running. You could scarcely hear it; and at that time of day, you know, it nearly always makes itself heard. I was down there at the bottom of the lawn when I heard the trap come in. It had suddenly gone cold, for some ragged clouds had swept up in front of the sun. The end of May is often cold with us . . . George came down the path to me, looking very tired, and I showed him that the first bud on the carmine had broken. It looked more brilliant in this cold light than in the sunshine. He said first of all: 'Charlie Grosmont's better. He's actually had a quiet night,' and I said: 'I hope that means a quiet night for us. You're not going there

again this evening, are you?' 'No,' he said, 'I'm looking forward to a sleep. Do you know it's going to rain? Did you hear the thunder?' I hadn't heard the thunder, which was muttering away behind the ridges somewhere. You know, I am just a little deaf, although you wouldn't notice it. But as we turned to go into the house one of those ragged clouds spattered us with rain. It was lovely for my flowers. You could see them quivering with ecstasy."

'I always found it fascinating to listen to Mrs Meredith's commentary upon the Trecastel drama. One saw the thing which had been engrossing in its passion from such an unusual angle. I don't mean that the Merediths were unsympathetic—indeed, I don't know how the Trecastel people could have managed without them—but the way in which the good lady told it—that low, level, hypnotising voice of hers which carried with it a suggestion of drowsiness and peace, like the hum of bees in a lime-tree—was so effective a contrast to that other commentary that was always with me: the black bars of mountain which blocked the place in my vision where the sky should be, the consciousness of other ridges beyond as desolate as these, and others still, rolling westward into Wales. Mrs Meredith was a kind of connecting link between two atmospheres, that of the mountain's terrible desolation, and that of the smiling plain below, where the bud of May was already bursting into full-blown summer. If it hadn't been for the Merediths, I think I should have forgotten that there was such a thing as sunshine in the world . . . not exactly that, but rather that there was such a thing as pastoral

peace, as water meadows or silent rivers, or farmsteads where content has made its home.

'And now, in the same level tones, with the same air of placid suspension, she was telling me of what I suppose was the most awful night that had ever fallen on Trecastel, that had been ushered in with the voice of Mrs Maddy, crying out in the dark house and beating with the palms of her hands upon the door of the lovers' tower. . . .

'"So we went to bed rather early," she proceeded, "and soon dropped off to sleep. I told you, didn't I? that the night had gone quite cold; but we left the window wide open just to smell the garden, which was so fragrant after the thunder-rain. We always have a bed of gilly-flowers—it's far the prettiest name for them—planted right under our windows, and the mountain clematis was all starry with flower. It's strange how quickly rain will swell the streams; the brook was quite talkative that night."

'And while these two old people were asleep Alaric was plunging, like a madman, through the dripping lanes, to Felindre. He came to the doctor's house. I suppose he didn't see the bell, or perhaps he didn't look for it. He knew the room in which the Merediths slept, at the back of the house, overlooking the garden. He came round and stood beneath the window calling, and then he picked up a clod from the bed of wall-flowers, and threw it against the window.

'"George is a very light sleeper," said Mrs Meredith. "I think all old people sleep lightly. He was standing at the window before I was properly awake. I knew Alaric's voice as soon as I heard him speak, but I

could scarcely believe my ears when he said that Charlie was dead. 'Dead?' said the doctor. 'Nonsense. Wait a moment, Alaric, I'll be down.' I put on a dressing-gown, and came down with him. Alaric was not at the door. We went round to the back, and found that the poor fellow had fainted all over my wallflowers. 'Fetch some brandy, Constance,' said the doctor, but before I came back with the glass Alaric had come round.

'"He's dead. . . . Haven't you gone yet?" That was all he would say.

'Dr Meredith induced Alaric to sit down in the dining-room while he went out to put the horse in. Mrs Maddy's brother, the groom, lived some way down the village street, and the doctor usually turned out himself on night messages. "Why don't you ride?" said Alaric. "It will be quicker, and I can easily follow you on foot. I won't be long." "Won't you, indeed?" said Meredith. "You're just about as fit to walk back to Trecastel as to fly there; you're pretty well done, my friend. Sit down, and keep quiet till I'm ready for you."

'He gulped down Mrs Meredith's brandy, and sat back in the doctor's arm-chair. "He really did look ghastly," she said. "He had run all the way in his carpet slippers through the wet lanes. They were soaked and pulpy. His trousers were all splashed with mud and a trailing bramble had torn his face. He wasn't conscious of the blood himself, but it showed up horribly on his big pale cheek. A few minutes later the doctor came in. He insisted on Alaric wearing one of his overcoats, told him he'd get pneumonia

if he didn't. He was splendid with Alaric, so sane and business-like and . . . soldierly. I always think what a fine soldier George would have made. We got Alaric into his overcoat, and I untied the horse; but when the doctor told him to jump up, the poor fellow missed the step and hurt his shin. He was really too exhausted to get into the trap. And he'd talked about walking home. . . ."

'All the way to Trecastel Alaric did not speak a word. He just sat huddled up in the doctor's overcoat. Meredith was driving fast. Sometimes his whip caught in the moisture-laden boughs, and the drops rained heavily upon them. At length they came into the courtyard of Trecastel. The doctor helped Alaric down. He lay, tired out, on the sofa in the hall. A man of his weight cannot run five miles in carpet slippers without feeling it.

'Mrs Maddy was waiting for the doctor on the stairs. "He's passed away," she whispered. "He's dead . . . quite dead."

'"We'll see, we'll see," said Meredith.

'They had pulled Charlie on to his back. He lay there with pennies on his eyes. (Mrs Maddy.) When he saw the pennies, the doctor grunted. He took out his toy-trumpet stethoscope, and listened for Charlie's heart. He tried to feel his pulse. He gave Mrs Maddy back her pennies, and looked at Charlie's eyes.

'He went rather red in the neck. "I could see he'd a thought of something," said Mrs Maddy afterwards. "Where's the tube of hyoscin tablets?" he said. Mrs Maddy shuffled round, and brought him the hypodermic

syringe which Judith had boiled. "Is this them?" she asked.

'"No, no—a tube with little white pellets. Hah?"

'She jumped: he asked her so abruptly. She brought him the little tube from the mantelpiece. It was empty.

'"Who's been with him to-night?"

'"The missus's been with him."

'"All the time?"

'Mrs Maddy was quick in Judith's defence. "Yes —poor dear, but she was so tired-like, I think she may have fell asleep."

'"Where is she?"

'"I'll fetch her."

'Judith was still lying on Alaric's sofa. When Mrs Maddy came to her she was stretched out with her face buried in the cushions, sobbing.

'"The doctor wants you, my love," cooed Mrs Maddy.

'"Is he dead?" she gasped.

'"Yes, he's passed away, poor dear," said Mrs Maddy soothingly.

'"He isn't dead. He can't be dead. Oh dear, dear, dear, he can't be . . . he can't be." She pulled herself together, swept back the hair from her face; it was all bedraggled with tears. "Does he know I was here?" she asked.

'"No, my dear, *nor* he never won't from me," said Mrs Maddy stoutly.

'"If he asks me," said Judith, "I shall have to tell him. I couldn't say 'no' if he asks me. Is Alaric there?"

'"No, my lovey, he's downstairs. Come along, there's a dear."

'"He isn't there with the doctor, is he?"

'Mrs Maddy put her arm round Judith, and helped her across the room.

'"I'd rather walk by myself, thank you," she said. "I'm all right now."

'As they came to the door of the passage they heard Alaric coming up the stairs. Judith hurried. "I don't want to see him just now," she whispered.

'Dr Meredith was so kind to her that she had to cry once more. He put his hands on her shoulders, and told her to cheer up. Mrs Maddy had told him, he said, that she had fallen asleep at her post; and really that wasn't to be wondered at. She mustn't worry any more; it wasn't her fault that she had dropped off: but could she tell him when last she saw Charlie breathing? She told him how once or twice she had looked closely to see if he were all right. It must have been ten o'clock when last she saw him breathing. Then, for the first time, she remembered her dream. Until that moment the picture had vanished as dream pictures will, although she knew that there was something she wanted to recall and couldn't. She remembered suddenly the white mist swirling away on the wind, and then Charlie standing by the mantelpiece in his pyjamas, laughing at her. She was too driven to realise where the dream began or ended; she couldn't remember for certain when the thing had happened, but the sudden isolated picture forced itself on her memory.

'"I can't tell you when I saw him. It may have

been . . . Oh, I don't know. Oh, have I killed him? Have I killed him?"

'"My dear child, don't think about it," said Meredith. "Of course it isn't your fault. You were tired out. You're tired out now. I expect he had planned it all. If once they get a strong will to put an end to themselves, it's difficult to stop them. If any one's to blame I am to blame. I reproach myself. . . . Indeed, I never dreamed. . . ."

'He told Judith that she must go to bed. Mrs Maddy was already rebusied with her pennies. "He isn't the first loved one as I've laid out," she boasted. Dr Meredith drove slowly back to Felindre in a perfumed dawn. The hawthorn buds were bursting in the hedges.

'"When George came home," said Mrs Meredith, "he was in a dreadful state. I've never known him quite so miserable except on the day when we got the wire from Edinburgh about our great trouble. He was younger then, and that was a blow in the dark against which he couldn't guard himself; but this, you see, was a calamity which he felt that he might have prevented. They say that medical men are callous—that there isn't any room in their lives for pity. That only means that they don't sympathise with old ladies who have poisoned themselves with tea and stuffy drawing-rooms. George is more full of pity than any one I've known. He's much less callous than I am. Callous, indeed! . . . But this Grosmont affair knocked him over. When he is like that he is awfully difficult to manage. He won't talk very much. He won't eat. You simply can't get him to eat; and his

face wears a funny fixed expression, as if he were afraid to move his features for fear of breaking down, a regular tragic mask. He generally goes into the garden alone. My dear, it reminds me of that other agony in the garden. George is so simple and so good. Oh, you'll never realise how good George really is. . . .

'"Well, that is what he did on that awful morning when he came home. I brought him a cup of tea down among the roses. He kissed me, but I don't think he ever drank it; and then he came into the house just as I'd finished breakfast—or rather pretended to finish it, for I couldn't eat either—and told me that he was going off to Trecastel again. He must see Alaric, and he must write to the coroner. It came as a great shock to me. 'The coroner?' I said. 'Yes,' said he. 'I'm very nearly a murderer. He got at the hyoscin. I wish I'd never touched the stuff. I've never had an accident of this kind before. Judith was asleep, poor child, and he got at it. He took enough to kill an elephant.' I insisted on the coachman driving him this time. Just before he started, he brought me the fair copy of his letter to the coroner; he'd taken nearly an hour over it. 'Will this do, Constance?' he said. He always shows me his letters like that."

'And so the dear man drove away to Trecastel without any breakfast. They told him that Alaric was in the tower. He had been there alone ever since he had stumbled upstairs the night before. He also had eaten nothing. Dr Meredith hammered at the door. There was no answer, so he entered the room. Alaric was

kneeling at the little *prie-dieu* beneath the crucifix. It gave the good doctor rather a shock.

'It was inevitable, for Alaric had exhausted every other alternative. Reason had been unable to save him from the assaults of passion, a passion which religion taught him was unholy; and this unholy passion had brought its penalty. The wages of sin is death. He believed himself—for you must remember he knew nothing of Judith's sleep—he believed himself stamped with the brand of Cain, his brother's murderer. And it must have seemed to him that everything fitted in to the picture; he must have seen in this calamity the fulfilment of all his vague terror and unrest, the explanation of that fanciful antagonism between religion and his love which had struck him in the Dulas valley, before the wooden crosses of the monastery. This disaster was the fatal thing which he had been dreading all his life, in North Bromwich as well as Trecastel. In North Bromwich, he had found an amazing relief in the mysteries of religion. He had carried the cross in the St Chad's processionals. You have always imagined that he had been driven to this by the black extremity of need that fell on him after the Wilburn smash. Perhaps you were mistaken. Perhaps it was some incident a little nearer to this last. Nobody will ever know, I suppose. And even if there had been nothing of the kind, you must remember he was a Silurist before he became a lover.

'When Dr Meredith found him prostrate before his crucifix, he tapped Alaric on the shoulder, and our poor friend got up, very stiffly. His clothes were still

covered in mud, his face in blood. He didn't seem to realise the passage of time, that the doctor had been to Felindre and back since he last saw him.

'"Well," he said, "is he dead? Perhaps they were mistaken."

'The doctor told him that there had been no mistake. "It's a terrible thing; but no one is to blame except myself."

'"Ah, you don't know," said Alaric. "I see you don't know. But I must tell you. I cannot live with the weight of it on my mind. I am responsible for his death. The sin is mine, and mine only." The doctor thought that Alaric, too, was beside himself. "Don't worry about it now, my dear fellow, what you want is sleep. When you have rested you will feel better. I'll send you a sleeping draught."

'"Sleep?" cried Alaric. "No, I must tell you now. I beg you to listen to me. In the sight of God I am an adulterer."'

'Old Meredith began to realise his worst fears. Clearly Alaric was mad. He tried a little hearty raillery. He might just as well have joked Mahomet about his wives. Alaric took it all with the same frigid intensity without the ghost of a smile. Then he said: "You think I'm off my head with worry and excitement. I'm not. When I said just now that I was an adulterer in the sight of God I meant it. Judith was here with me when Charlie died. She left him to come to me. It was entirely my fault. I made love to her. I was mad. But you needn't think I'm mad now. I was never saner than I am at this minute."

'"My dear fellow," said old Meredith, "if you're not

mad, and of course you aren't, you're certainly talking nonsense. Judith was asleep at the time. Mrs Maddy found her asleep. And I'm not surprised; the poor child was tired to death. You cannot make her responsible for Charlie's death. It was an accident: a horrible accident. That's all. Cheer up, my dear chap, it's very hard for all of us. It's a terrible thing. We know that . . . but . . . but we must all pull together, and make the best of it, mustn't we? . . . You are not exactly your brother's keeper, hah?"

'It all sounded rather feeble, even to the doctor himself, and the habitually convincing "hah" at the end came out very thin, for Alaric was staring at him out of those blue eyes of his—twice as big as usual they seemed in the sunken orbits—with a curiously detached look, the kind of gaze you only meet in animals or lunatics. He broke into a high chant: "And the Lord said, what hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand." He gave a big sob, and fell once more at the foot of the crucifix.

'"My God," thought poor old Meredith, "here's another!"

'He honestly thought that it wouldn't be safe to leave Alaric in this state. For a moment he hesitated. Then he said: "Alaric, I want you to listen to me. I've written to the coroner. Of course, there is bound to be an inquest. Some one will have to make arrangements for the jurymen and for Mr Williams. I must rely on you to have the room ready and some kind of

refreshment. You cannot have these people coming from so many miles away and offer them nothing."

'Alaric looked up blankly. "An inquest? What do you mean? You know what he died of. . . ."

'"In any case of poisoning," the doctor explained.

'"Poisoning?" cried Alaric. "She couldn't have done that. . . ."

'Meredith explained everything to him. He had imagined that he knew already. Alaric was still kneeling. He looked stunned under it all. "It must have been when she left him to come to me," he whispered; "will she be forced to give evidence?"

'"I don't think we can help that. It's in the coroner's discretion."

'"Oh, my child, my poor child," moaned Alaric. A moment later he seemed to pull himself together. "I will see that everything is prepared," he said. "When will the inquest be?"

'When Dr Meredith left him, Alaric seemed to have returned to his normal, taciturn self, but he couldn't quite understand all the nonsense about Judith, whom he had been assured was asleep in her chair when Mrs Maddy discovered her. He mentioned Alaric's delusion to Mrs Maddy.

'"He said that, the liar," she cried. "Then he deserves to be struck dumb for his wickedness. I've told you she was asleep in her chair. Sitting there with her little eyes closed like an angel. You mustn't take no notice of what *he* says. He's a queer one. Oh, what a wicked thing to say! He's a devil, that's what he is."

'Two days later the inquest was held. Mr Williams,

the coroner, drove all the way from Aberdulas, and Tomas Gwyn was a member of the jury. Mrs Meredith hunted up for me a yellow copy of the *County Times*, which contained a full report of the proceedings. "That will show you exactly what happened better than I can tell you," she said. I wish you could realise just how I felt reading that report. It seemed funny to me—I can't guess why—to see the names of these people, names which had been so often in my mind that they were more real to me than the people themselves could ever be, put down in black and white, and reading, well, just like any other people's names. What do you think of "Judith Harriet Grosmont, wife of the deceased"? This woman could not be my beautiful Judith! And the whole of that report read just like the report of any other inquest, which was obviously ridiculous. I'll tell you what it did for me; it set me wondering what strange stories, probably no less engrossing than this, may underlie any one of those brief inquest paragraphs that you pass over daily in a newspaper. "Not a particularly original conclusion," you suggest. . . . Perhaps not, but it was the first time I had been brought face to face with your truism; and it startled me, as the truth generally does. It's a funny thing, don't you think, that a verbatim report should seem so much less real than the least of my imaginings? I suppose you will solve the problem by saying that the report of the *County Times* was not a work of art. . . .

'At any rate, you shall hear what I gathered from this valley of dry bones. Judith, poor child, identified the body—a matter of form, I suppose; and then old

Meredith went into the box, and made—even our friend the reporter (he was not a very good hand at *oratio obliqua*) cannot disguise it—a most handsome admission of his own contributary negligence. You know, he always exaggerated his own possible share in the catastrophe. I wonder whether the coroner, or the jury, or Alaric, or any one in that room realised what an enormously heroic figure this old man, so square and simple, was cutting at that moment? He blamed himself, he said—he could never forgive himself. There was no shadow of doubt but that death was due to hyoscin poisoning. The coroner elicited all the usual details about the poison: Mrs Meredith had looked them up for the doctor in the *Extra Pharmacopœia*. Then came the question, "Was the poison self-administered?" Obviously; for who in the world could or would have administered it except the deceased. Mr Williams becomes acutely judicial: "Have you any proof, can you say definitely, that this is the case?" Of course, Dr Meredith could say nothing of the sort. He hints at Judith's impression, half dream if you will, of Charlie standing at the mantelpiece smiling at her. "This is the first I have heard of it," says the coroner. "Perhaps Mrs Grosmont will tell us later."'

'Alaric's last hope is gone. Judith will be recalled.

'"Do you know of any one in the household or elsewhere who could have benefited by Grosmont's death?" asks Mr Williams.

'The good doctor clutches at a cliché. "Certainly not; Charlie Grosmont had no enemy but himself."

'You can see that there is very little to be got out

of this newspaper report. Infinitely more valuable was even the little which Mrs Meredith could tell me—just what she remembered of what she got second-hand from the doctor. "It must have been a funny sort of inquest," she said . . . "really quite a family affair. They were all sitting down in the hall, the jurymen on either side of the black oak table, Mr Williams at the top, the reporter at the bottom, and the poor unfortunate witnesses anywhere they could get. Of course, they were not bothered with the usual crowd of people who are merely curious, for Trecastel was so remote, and we have very few idlers here. Judith and Mrs Maddy sat in one corner of the room—the doctor at Judith's elbow—and over on the window-seat was Alaric with his head in his hands. George never even saw his face until he began to give evidence. First came Judith, and then the doctor, and then Alaric's name was called. He got up slowly and gave a sort of lurch, which landed him at the foot of the table. He took the oath. Most impressive, said George. 'I swear by Almighty God,' and so on. He said it in a way which made them all shudder. Old Mr Williams, who is really a very nice man, although he's such a stupid coroner, looked quite astonished. You see, it is most unusual for witnesses in a coroner's court to take an oath, as though the salvation of their souls depended on it. But when he came to his actual evidence, he wasn't nearly so intense. He really made an excellent witness, spoke clearly, and without hesitation. A little hurriedly, perhaps; but then he was irritated at Mr Williams's meanderings: he wanted to get to the point. And the point never came. The

coroner had said 'Thank you,' before he had a chance of getting it out. Alaric didn't sit down. He went on, standing at the foot of the table, and then said, in a low voice, that he wanted to make a statement.

'"'In the sight of God, . . .' he began. It nearly drove George mad. He thought the old adulterer business was coming out. He interrupted Alaric halfway, by telling the coroner that he didn't think Mr Grosmont was in a fit state to make any statement. Mr Williams agreed. 'It is quite unnecessary,' he said. 'We have all the evidence that is needed.'

'"But there was no holding Alaric. . . . He came out with the whole story, making the case against himself as black as a skilled criminal lawyer could have done. He called it a statement. Really it was a diabolically clever piece of special pleading. He painted himself as an absolute monster. Judith sat through it all helplessly. Alaric made her only a little less than an angel in his story. She was really too numb to realise half that he was saying. She could only take hold of George's hand and whisper, 'Oh, they don't want me to go to the table again, do they? They don't, do they? . . .' And I'm sure that George was sweet with her."

'Poor Mrs Meredith nearly cried in her solicitude for George, the position struck her as so pathetic even in retrospect. I couldn't get very much out of her. Of course, the sensation was immense, though it would have been very much greater if Alaric had not made such a fantastic figure as he stood at the bottom of the table, swaying slightly, as though he were on the point of falling, speaking like a prophet with his pale

face uplifted. Dr Meredith leaned over the coroner's shoulder. "I'm prepared to swear that Mr Grosmont is not in the full possession of his faculties . . . You will understand, sir . . . the strain . . ." The coroner nodded.

'Alaric came to the end of his scandalous pleading. He stood still at the end of that table as though he were waiting to be handcuffed or consumed by lightning or something of that kind. They had to wake him up, in a way of speaking, before they could get him away. Of course, the coroner instructed the jury that Alaric's statement was beside the point. Of course, they brought in the usual verdict. Then they had a comfortable cup of tea in the kitchen, followed by a nip of Charlie's whisky to set them up on their way. After the tension of the inquest this reunion became a very pleasant little function. You can imagine Mrs Maddy . . . It must have been a long time since Trecastel had heard such a merry clatter of crockery. Dr Meredith, who had stayed behind in the hall with Judith, heard it. He was a queer old fellow. Do you know he made a point of mentioning that happy tea-party in the kitchen to his wife? It just struck him, you see, that Charlie's body was lying in the room immediately above, and it was not merely a conventional respect for the dead man that disturbed him. "I am always ready to take off my hat to a dead man' (that's how he spoke to Mrs Meredith). There's many a body which is—how would you put it?—purified, made suddenly clearer when the soul has left it."'

'I am glad,' said Marsden,' that you are giving poor Charlie a little show in this official day; since that

picture of his *verklärte leib,* with all the marks of the whisky and the passions and despairs smoothed out of it, has been with me all through your story of the coroner's quest; principally, I suppose, because the poor fellow seemed to me neglected. You must admit an element of comedy in the anxiety of the doctor and Alaric to prove the degree of their own criminal responsibility, of Mrs Maddy to establish Judith's innocence, of the coroner to catch his last train to Aberdulas, of the jury to be rid of the whole nuisance, all except Tomas Gywn, who was taking a catalogue no doubt . . . What about Alaric?'

'Alaric? When the coroner had begun to pack his bundles of papers together Alaric had disappeared. At the time nobody had noticed him go except Judith and the doctor. Meredith was really worried—the fellow was in a condition when he might do anything —but he didn't like to leave Judith. The poor child was sitting up quite straight in her chair with her hands clasped in front of her, not restfully, you know, but in a state of slight tension. And then from time to time she would be shaken by a little spasmodic movement, something between a shudder and a sob. I should have told you that she was already in black. Mrs Maddy had seen to that. You may picture her sitting with old Meredith in the hall, listening to the happy clatter of tea-things, undisturbed but for an occasional visit from Mrs Maddy, rather flushed and important, feeling it her duty to relieve tension.

'"I wish these men'd wipe their boots before they come into a house, making work for everybody."

'"Silly woman," said Mrs Meredith.

'At length Judith spoke: "Alaric's gone. . . ."

'"I expect he's gone to the tower," said the doctor. "He is very upset. The Grosmonts are very nervous. In emergencies . . . in times of stress . . . this sort of thing, you know . . . they're rather strange. Don't worry yourself, my child."

'"He thinks . . ." Judith began.

'"Never you mind what he thinks. . . ."

'"But he hasn't spoken to me since . . . since then. He's avoided me. . . ."

'"More fool he . . . hah?" said the doctor.

'"I know Alaric. He did it once before. But this time it's different. Why should he keep away from me? What have I done?"

'"My dear child, you can answer that yourself, hah? Nothing . . . Nothing whatever. Don't take any notice of him. He'll be all right when he's slept on it. He wants sleep."

'There was a sinister echo in the word which must have struck them both. "If he goes on like that I shan't be able to stay here. I couldn't bear it. I would rather be dead," said Judith.

'The doctor told her not to worry about Alaric, assured her that he would get over his mood. She said nothing in reply; but he found it difficult to leave her, she seemed so puzzled and pathetic, so horribly alone. When he had ridden a mile or so from Trecastel he turned in his saddle and looked back at that gray tower, thinking of Judith. He was caught up in an accession of pity. "One of those queer impulses that sometimes knock a man over—hah?"

'It wasn't altogether without reason that he was

sorry for the child. A fortnight went by. Alaric was still sulking in his tower. It is true that he appeared at meal-times, generally when the two women had finished, eating stolidly and taking not the least notice of Judith. He took care that their eyes never met. He very rarely spoke with Mrs Maddy and on these occasions Mrs Maddy did most of the talking. She hadn't forgotten (and never would forget) his disloyalty in speaking the truth. Mrs Maddy despised him. She had said he was a devil, and she meant it. In the very marrow of her I believe she would have thought more of Judith if her precious lamb had stood up to him and "told him out." "Stand up?" said Mrs Maddy. "He 'as as much feeling as an elephant."

'He was sulking in his tower, I've said. The degree of his prostration before the carved Christ nobody can guess at. You would have thought that the limitations of those four stark walls would be almost intolerable, that from time to time he would feel an impulse beyond his power of control to burst out into air and sunlight. You must picture a good deal of air and sunlight outside. The thunder weather on the fringe of the anti-cyclone had gone, and now a cooler wind was brushing the flank of the mountain with that suggestion of cleanliness which cold air carries with it in summer. Once or twice he did escape. The women knew it. Turning his back on Trecastel, he made straight for the high mountain, and Judith secretly, from behind the muslin blind in the attic, watched his figure dwindle up the bracken path. And once he stayed on the mountain for a whole day and a night. Both Judith and Mrs Maddy knew that he was gone,

but neither of them dared mention what they knew to the other: Judith because she dreaded Mrs Maddy's rough tongue; Mrs Maddy in case her mistress should happen not to know. She had not seen Judith watching at the attic window. "A good job," she thought, "if he never came back. Then there'd be some peace."

'I sometimes wonder if it is too fantastic to imagine that those long fasting sojourns in the mountain and the desert place were the occasion of Alaric's hardest struggle. I am thinking, you know, of a similar incident which must have suggested itself to him: another temptation on the mountain. And there, no doubt, he saw stretched out before him all the kingdoms of the earth. Why in the world shouldn't he take them? Everything was now so different; there was no reason except the convention of mourning, which he could logically advance against marrying Judith off-hand, more precious, I suppose, than many kingdoms. It was the obvious thing to do, even if he went so far as to forget Charlie's: "You'll look after little Judy, won't you?" It wasn't a question of honour, nor even of generosity; and I can't for the life of me see how religion comes into it. . . . Except just in this way: I have always had a notion that Alaric put a good deal of trust in the idea of renunciation, not as a religious duty but simply as a means of escape. His moral courage—if you like to call it that—had its springs in a native timidity, and the men of that kind are most timid of all when they are in love. One is tempted to echo Mrs Meredith, to shelve the matter with "Alaric was always like that," or something of that sort; but I believe one should really put it down to

the immense shock and laceration which his shyness had received in its very first contact with the passions. Indeed, you must grant him a pretty awful experience on that night of physical exhaustion and mental terror which sent him staggering to the foot of the crucifix, his old refuge. No doubt for a time he believed that his brother's blood was on his hands, that he had lost all sense of honour and decency, that atonement was in some way (*I* don't understand these things) demanded. But afterwards, in the light of those lovely sun-washed evenings when the cool wind had blown the incense out of his mind and he began to feel that he could stand without clutching at the cross, do you really think that it was his scruples that withheld him? Put it in terms of Dr Meredith: "Once bitten: twice shy," and infinitely shy at that! One feels very sorry for Alaric. It would have simplified the position if he had felt it consistent with his duty to Judith to leave Trecastel. I suppose he thought he could exercise a sort of benign surveillance from his tower . . . It must have been very wearing.

'We won't question his benignity. I can only tell you that his attitude was very wearing to Judith, who was not armoured in triple casuistry. Judith went right to pieces under it. The horribly anomalous position told on her far more than Charlie's illness had done. And Judith was not built to bear these things without kicking. There was nothing lanquid about the Gwyns. She wasn't afraid of suffering either. She was even prepared to go home to that dirty cottage at the head of the Roman Road. If Trecastel became intolerable, that was the natural thing to do. As a

matter of fact, nothing could be more convincing of the absolute isolation of Trecastel than that she should have dreamed of returning to Cold Harbour. It shows you that she had no idea of the way in which rumour had elaborated the story of Charlie's death. For although the *County Times* had prudently suppressed all the uncomfortable evidence at the inquest, the jurymen's tongues had been loosened (at Charlie's expense), so that they all had a pretty tale to tell to their wives. You have it on Mrs Meredith's authority that Felindre is a great place for gossip. All along the scattered villages of the plateau people began to talk. They talked at Aberdulas, on market day. It was believed widely, and in perfectly good faith, that the real story of Charlie's death had been hushed up, that through some dark scheme he had been put out of the way by Judith and her confessed lover. The word "poison" was enough. Suicide was all very well for a jury's verdict—the thing was better hidden without unpleasantness—but suicide wasn't good enough for people who knew. And everybody professed to know. It was at this point that Charlie's old popularity came in. Alaric was almost unknown to the country-side, which remembered nothing except the odd reputation of his boyhood, and to be unknown was to be condemned. Judith's name was enough to discredit her. And even if she were a murderess, what else might one expect from a Gwyn? Tomas developed a new and strange fastidiousness; not for a moment because he believed his daughter guilty, but because scandal is bad for trade. He grumbled about it when he brought a cartload of bottles to

Felindre. Mrs Meredith preserved his phrase. "There's a regular human-cry all over the place," he said. "Why don't you stop it? You're her father," said Mrs Meredith.

'Really the Gwyns behaved very badly, especially Evan and the mother. They appeared even to sanction the murder theory, saying that Judith had always been a rum 'un, that they had done with her for years and hoped never to see her face again, the wicked little toad. And Judith, in her innocence, had thought of going home! I wonder, indeed, if she visited Cold Harbour with that idea. If she did she must surely have stumbled home crushed and wounded, for Mrs Gwyn was a pretty beastly woman at the best of times (even if she had a palpable excuse for her beastliness in Tomas), and all the worst of her seems to have been exaggerated in the presence of Judith, even the little ragged Judith of so many years ago, who had done nothing in the world for which to be bullied.

'It is interesting to speculate what would have happened if our friend Alaric had chanced to meet this bruised and trembling Judith on her way home from Cold Harbour—if she had told him of the foul words with which she had been spattered. Alaric was so acutely sensitive to the pathetic. . . . But obviously this didn't happen, or the beginning of my story would have been different.'

XI

'FELINDRE, too, was very near Trecastel, and almost too near Cold Harbour to be comfortable. The Dulas Fechan valley, on the other hand, might be a hundred miles away from either. There is a good deal to be said for natural boundaries, and particularly for such an effective boundary as that big wave of mountain. That was the best reason of all for Judith's flight to Our Lady of Llandulas, its geographical remoteness; but what appealed to her even more was the sense of spiritual remoteness with which she had always connected it, ever since the day when Alaric and she had been mist-bound on the mountain. She had never been quite free from the haunting of that day. The memory of it had soothed her all the time when she was lying on the sofa at Trecastel in the shadow of the wind-tossed lilac. In her dreams she had often heard the tolling of the monastery bell; when she lay awake on winter nights she had strained to catch it beneath the scurry of the wind; even on that last dreadful night at Trecastel it had set vibrating the tissue of her dreams. The monastery stood to her for peace and for seclusion. Be quite certain that it didn't stand for religion: there was no question of a vocation. I do not even know whether Sister Ursula tried to convert her to the particular brand of Catholic salvationism which the monastery affected, but I doubt, in any case, if it would have appealed to Judith. Matthews,

the inn-keeper, naturally had a good deal to do with the monastery people, and from what he told me of it the place must have been a gloomier prison even than Trecastel. It lay in the pit of the Dulas Fechan valley, facing due north, festooned in black pines as in a wrapping of crape. The whole building was draughty and ill-built, the quarters horribly cramped and never visited by sunshine, the air vitiated by the smell of damp walls and of stale incense. I have told you already how the place offended Alaric. The statue of Our Lady in its iron-spiked enclosure, the trumpery wooden crosses, the arrogant inscriptions . . . It wouldn't have affected Judith in the same way, of course; but from what she told Mrs Meredith one gathers that the chill and the dampness entered into her soul as soon as she set foot on the mossed gravel drive. Our Lady, in her iron cage, gave her a shock of a different kind. "I'd never seen a statue like that before—with its hands stretched out, you know—I almost wondered if they would move. It was quite frightening."

'I wonder how much of security or of peace she felt as she passed under the drip of the black trees to the door of the lodge. "A Gothic door," Mrs Meredith described it, "with big rusty nails hammered into it to make it look strong, and a grille in the upper part of it." Judith had to wait on the step a long time. Over the door an inscription in white paint said: "Jesus only," which made her wonder if she had mistaken the entrance; and all the time the stones above the doorway were sweating beads of moisture which dribbled over the smooth surface of the paint

between the cracks. And then a woman whom she came to know later as Sister Ursula, a squat creature, dirty skinned, who panted with unhealthy fat, climbed up on a small wooden stool and stared timidly at Judith through the grille.

"'Oh, I thought it was another of those tramps," she said sighing. "It's just the season of the year when they begin to be frequent . . . and they tell one another so." She climbed down again from her stool and pulled the door back with a scrape. "What do you want?" she said, not ill-humouredly. Judith asked for the mother superior. A bell started tolling in short jerks. . . .

"'Poor things!" was Mrs Meredith's verdict on the religious of the Llandulas monastery, and it really is difficult to think of their tawdry squalor without pity. It was such a cheap imitation of the real thing. I had visited the place in its desertion before I left the Dulas Fechan valley (you know that with the death of Father Augustine the whole business petered out), and could bring a good deal of atmosphere to the help of Mrs Meredith's story. It made the picture of Judith with the breath of the mountain still about her very pathetic. I can see her in that shabby little refectory that smelt like a cellar. The walls were jerry built, with river mud for mortar, and the sodden plaster within was painted a dark light-forbidding blue—almost blue-black. This was the father's only idea of mural decoration. I would sooner have taken all my meals in the crypt of Westminster Abbey. The door of the refectory opened into a cloister whose centre should have been filled with pleasant green. In the

middle stood a Morello cherry tree which may have filled the place in springtime with billows of light; but when I saw it in summer, the elders which had sprung up around it choked the air with their heavier perfume. There was another horror in that little quadrangle: an immense carved crucifix, of more than life size, barbarously painted, standing upright in the unkempt grass. I shall never forget the disgust which this vulgar image gave me. The salvation Army could give the Llandulas monastery points in matters of taste . . .

'Well, probably, as you say, none of these things disgusted Judith—at any rate in the same way as they disgusted me; but even if she wasn't offended by the mockery of religion (you see she had no religion), she must have been oppressed by the dampness and the gloom of the place. True, she had lived for some years at Trecastel; but if Trecastel is gloomy it is also beautiful, it had none of the crying ugliness of this monastery where even the calm beauty of that valley is shut out by stone walls, plastered, and painted dark blue. It was really a good thing that Judith hadn't any of these uncomfortable sensibilities. She had come to the monastery, when all's said and done, for a rest and for a relief from the lacerating neutrality of their life at Trecastel. I suppose she got both; but life in a cell ten foot by twelve only varied by the excitement of eating in the crypt-like refectory and strolling along a moleish tunnel to the dim aromatic chapel was not likely to improve her bodily health, however much it chastened her fervent spirits—as witness the sighs and pantings of Sister Ursula, who had always been rather

anæmic. Judith grew pale, and thinner. The sisters were sorry to see this, for even the shadow of Judith which had come to them was deemed a miracle of brightness in the dinginess of Llandulas, but it didn't surprise them: they were all agreed that the place was unhealthy, and of course, being dependent on the proceeds of the Father's "preaching tours," they were sometimes rather short of money and, consequently, food.

'"I think it is the water," Sister Ursula used to sigh. "Coming off the mountain so quickly there's no iron in it, you see." In the hour of recreation the sisters generally talked about proprietary medicines. Judith was given some pink-coated pills to take after meals, but in spite of this specific fainted in chapel at three o'clock in the morning. She came to just as the sisters were carrying her through the underground passage. When she fainted she had a wonderful flying dream. It was a day of driven cirrus on the mountain top, and she was scudding along like a feather up in the sunlight. The air roared past her as she flew. . . . That was Sister Ursula sighing in her left ear. . . .

'This was the first time that Judith had ever fainted, and the experience rather frightened her. Perhaps it was because Mrs Maddy had spoilt her that she found the sisters a little unsympathetic. As a matter of fact they were used to this kind of thing; when a sister fainted more often than was reasonable, Sister Ursula doubled her dosage of pink pills. It is difficult, isn't it? to envisage Judith in these surroundings at all; to think of her among those twelve anæmic women mildewed in their cellar, or moving across that sad quadrangle under the eyes of the grotesque image.

Judith grew to hate that big crucifix more than anything in the monastery, where everything was hateful.

'One morning she felt so nervous and miserable—not exactly ill—that she stayed in bed long after the bell for Tierce had finished tolling. A little later Sister Ursula came into her cell. The day was breaking and the sister's face was overspread with a sort of green pallor. She went for Judith savagely; jealous, I suppose, that another woman should escape any of the bitterness which she had endured. She talked about rules, about the hard penances which the Father Abbot would certainly impose on the sisters when he came home. "You must put up with things like we do," she complained, "Who are you to be different? You come here without any call, and then you expect. . . . It was obvious that Sister Ursula wanted a squabble, and Judith was too tired for that.

'"When I get up my head goes all swimmy," she said. "I'm sure I'm going to be ill. Can't you send for the doctor, Sister Ursula?" The sister was shocked. To send for a doctor when the Father Abbot was away! Brother Ambrose would never consent to it, she was certain.

'"You surely don't know what it costs, or you'd never suggest such a thing," she said.

'But a few days later a brother from the monastery walked over to Felindre with a message for the doctor. "A rabbit-faced young man," said Mrs Meredith, "with pale hair. Poor thing, he looked as if he needed a square meal! Luckily the day was fine, and in the afternoon George rode over to Llandulas. He hadn't any idea who the patient was, but he guessed the

case must be fairly serious, or else Brother Ambrose would never have dared to send for him. George says the monastery is a perfect hotbed of homeopathy. But then . . . the poor things have to be economical, you know. Indeed, I can never imagine what happened to all the money which the Father collected on his preaching tours. Of course, the carriage road over the Bwlch is very poor, and the doctor preferred to ride alone. A pity too, for that poor weak-looking young man didn't seem fit to walk back seven miles. I wished afterwards we could have given him a lift." It was very nice of the old lady. . . .

'An hour later, then, Dr Meredith arrived at the monastery, was met by Brother Ambrose, handed over by him to Sister Ursula, and plunged into a long explanation, mostly irrelevant. She was so sorry that the doctor had been troubled, for she was certain that the patient wasn't half as ill as she pretended to be: a hysterical sort of girl; not really fitted for a monastic life at all. She hoped that the doctor would be able to put some sense into her. They went upstairs in the dark, and Sister Ursula flounced into the invalid's room without knocking.

'"Why—Judy—Judy!" said the doctor.

'"And there she lay, poor child," says Mrs Meredith, "with a gray flannel nightdress on . . . Gray flannel! looking just like a little girl, with her hair in a plait, you know. At last George got that other woman out of the room, and then Judith told him just how her funny little mind had worked, and how really she was happier on the whole at the Monastery than at Trecastel. She didn't mind the life at all if it weren't for those

funny fainty feelings. . . . 'Ah well, we'll look into that,' said George. And then, my dear, he had to break it to her as gently as he could, that she was going to have another baby. Judith simply wouldn't believe him. 'I never thought of such a thing,' she said."

'He assured her that there was no doubt whatever.

'"But I shall be able to stay here?" she pleaded. "Oh—I can't go back again . . . ."

'That, of course, was a matter for the Father Abbot to decide; and Dr Meredith, who had no wish to set that old hen Ursula clucking, went straight to Brother Ambrose, the secretary, whom he had usually found sensible. Poor Brother Ambrose! It upset him terribly. The Father was in Scotland preaching; he didn't quite know how to get hold of him, and even then he would hardly dare to tell him. Oh—it was a dreadful thing to happen! He told the doctor that a layman couldn't possibly realise the intensely difficult situation of a monastery like theirs. The simple fact of their having religious of both sexes was enough in itself to sow evil thoughts in the minds of the enemies of Jesus. The devil had never aimed a harder blow at them than this. Only think if the fact became known —a woman in *that* condition within the monastery walls —it would be published in every lying Evangelical rag in the country. People like the late Mr Kensit, you know. It might even make a difference to the amount of the Father's collections . . . and, goodness knows, money was tight enough already. One thing, at any rate, was certain, Judith could not stay under any consideration. It was providential indeed that they had sent for the doctor. Only to think if this

insidious calamity had been allowed to . . . to mature. Of course, Meredith pointed out that Judith was a married woman.

'"A widow surely," said Brother Ambrose.

'"Only four months a widow,"' said the doctor.

'"Please speak no more of it," sighed the secretary—there were tears in his eyes—"the whole thing is unspeakably horrible. You had better see her again and tell her. I should not like any one else in the monastery to know—particularly any of the sisters. Women feel so strongly on these matters. I should be obliged if you could . . . break the news to her yourself."

'It seemed as if the adjustment of these delicate emergencies was always to fall to the old man. How he put the matter to Judith I don't know, but when he came home to Felindre that evening he had the whole thing settled . . . "but for my approval," Mrs Meredith added, with a suspicion of pride.

'"And of course I approved," she went on. "What else could I do? He had arranged to drive over again to Llandulas next day with the small dog-cart and fetch Judith back to Felindre. Of course, it was a little surprising to have a guest like this thrust upon one at my time of life. It was so many years since I had had anything to do with . . . that sort of thing. It was a little trying for both of us, that first meeting, when George drove the pony trap right into the yard with Judith by his side. I was holding the horse's rein while he helped Judith down; and then she came right over to me and put up her face to be kissed. In a day or two, you know, it seemed as if she had been with us for years and years. She was a sweet child. . . .

It was hard to believe that she was really Tomas Gwyn's daughter. I think George would have liked her to stay with us for ever."

'"And how long did she stay with you?" I asked.

'"Until her baby was six weeks old. Of course, the scandal of George's birth—he was christened after the doctor—was infinitely worse than that of his father's death. Everybody was convinced that the baby was Alaric's; and indeed a lot of nasty things were said about our harbouring Judith. I wish to goodness people had known the real state of affairs between those two—and yet I don't know that I do: they'd have gossiped worse than ever. The one or two people who were silly enough to speak lightly of Judith to the doctor must have been sorry for it. I never in my life knew George take a thing more to heart than Judy's innocence."'

'You can imagine, can't you, just how the dear doctor would deal with these people?—with what a stiffening of that poker back of his and what a challenging "hah!"? But the most difficult time of all, as Mrs Meredith explained, was when Judith's return to Trecastel was planned. Not that Judith minded leaving them; the possession of her baby made her more or less independent of people and places. She had started, one might almost say, a new life; and when they asked her what she thought of going back to Trecastel, it seemed as if she had quite forgotten all the wretchedness and terror through which she lived there. She rather wanted to show the baby to Mrs Maddy! All the time that she had been with the Merediths they had been keeping watch on their tongues

for fear the name of Alaric should slip out; but when they began to talk about her return to Trecastel Judith came out quite ingenuously with "Is Alaric still there?"

'They told her, yes—that he had been there ever since. . . .

'"Does he want me to come?" she asked.

'And that they couldn't very well answer. Alaric had so far remained unapproachable. "I don't think I should like to go back if Alaric didn't want me to," she said next day.

'Once more it fell to the doctor to be ambassador. "He really hated it," said Mrs Meredith. "I think he would rather have undertaken anything, almost. You see, Alaric always had an extraordinary effect on him —sort of dried him up. He used to go there knowing exactly what he wanted to say, but when he saw Alaric, grave and distant and moony . . . and every bit as nervous as himself really, he'd begin to feel as if he'd come on false pretences and as if Alaric were seeing through him all the time: as if he were in some subtle way inferior. Well, this time he interviewed Alaric in his untidy tower. 'I want Judith to come home next week,' he said.

'"'Yes,' was all he could get for a reply.

'"'With her baby,' he said.

'"'With Charlie's baby,' said Alaric.

'"'You don't mind her coming?' said George. It wasn't in the least bit what he meant to say.

'"'I? . . . Of course not,' said Alaric. 'You had better talk to Mrs Maddy. My being here will hardly interfere with her. I can live just as I am doing now. I don't make any demands on Mrs Maddy.'"

Mrs Meredith was forced to add, "I can't tell you how Alaric irritates me."

'And thus they were living in this strange detachment, two years later, at the time when I stumbled on Trecastel in the dark. Two camps, you know: a neutrality that bristled with arms, for the excellent reason that it was so precarious.'

'Precarious in a way,' said Marsden. 'And yet not acutely precarious. Judith, I shouldn't consider dangerous. She was engrossed in her baby. If she had called it Pelléas instead of George . . . But Alaric seems not so safe: I don't believe, for instance, that a man whose loneliness was so flattered by dreams could ever forget the supreme moments of his passion—the night when his dark tower flared up like a beacon of love . . .'

'The night when he left it in mortal darkness, splashing through the lanes to Felindre,' I added.

'But in the main,' Marsden protested, 'don't you think that the memories of such exalted moments are more persistent than those of horror? The very room . . . the chance sight of Judith herself passing down the orchard path in springtime, the same nightingales . . . And, do you know, I suspect a very real weakness in his concern over the perambulator incident on the night of your visit—something caressing in his "She is so careless."'

'You talk like a matchmaker,' I protested.

'Of whom nature is the most inveterate . . .'

'Or like Mrs Meredith. This is how she ended her story, shaking her head: "The dear silly creatures l[illegible]"'

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